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ISSUE 619

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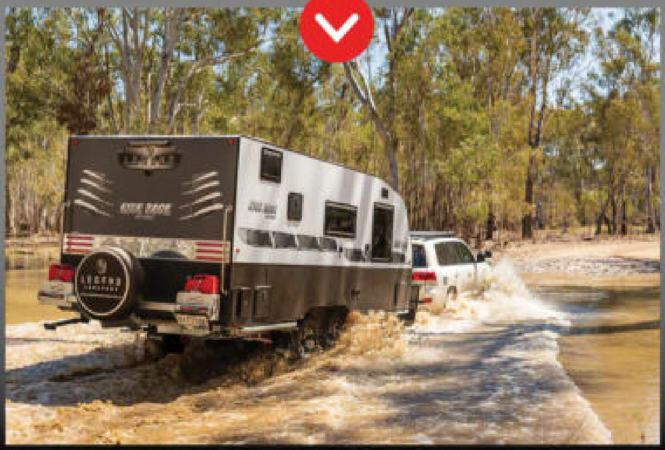

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FIRST WORDS JOHN FORD

I hope you have found a quiet place for some summer relaxation and the Christmas lunch has settled. There's is some excellent reading this month to help fill in a few sun-soaked hours and inspire you to tackle a coastal adventure, and if you plan a drive along the beach, Ron Moon lets you in on his secrets for making it back to firm ground.

The January break is an excellent caravanning month, and I see thousands of vans have ventured out after months of waiting faithfully in the driveway. So, take it easy – it's a holiday and it's supposed to be fun.

On top of all the Christmas cheer, the new year is a time of reflection and thanks to many readers, we have lots to think about. The response to our reader survey has been very heartening, with hundreds of responses already and many still coming through. We appreciate it.

We asked you for feedback on the magazine, and so far, the reaction has been very favourable and with lots of input about our future direction. It's also very heartening to see such enthusiasm for the printed magazine, especially from the younger readers. Who would have thought?

But we have our work cut out over 2022 to deliver on your ideas, and I'll get to those further down.

Firstly a few stats on the readers who responded. It's probably no surprise that most are in the older group, with many retired and spending a lot of time on the road in their van. However, I was surprised that only 30 per cent are dedicated blacktop travellers, with the rest venturing offroad for a lot of their journeys and nearly half able to free camp for more than three nights.

Nearly everyone would like to see more features on driving and towing, with 20 per cent finding offroad travel a worry. For over half of readers, the behaviour of other drivers is the most significant cause for concern when towing a van.

Readers have suggested we need more reviews on smaller and cheaper vans, and even though a reader took us to task for too many reviews of six-figure vans, and even though they are only a tiny fraction of the reviews of the last two years, maybe he's right because we have the big Spinifex in this issue and a Bushtracker that's coming up that are both on the upper end of the budget for most of us.

Going forward, we need to look at maintenance items like electrical systems (74 per cent of responses), gas systems, water upgrades, storage options, weight reduction and awning maintenance – we should be busy.

As far as suggestions for the magazine's future direction goes, I'm pleased I still have a job for a while yet, so thank you for the support.

Have fun,
John

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Snowy River SRC 22S
***Photographed by** John Ford*

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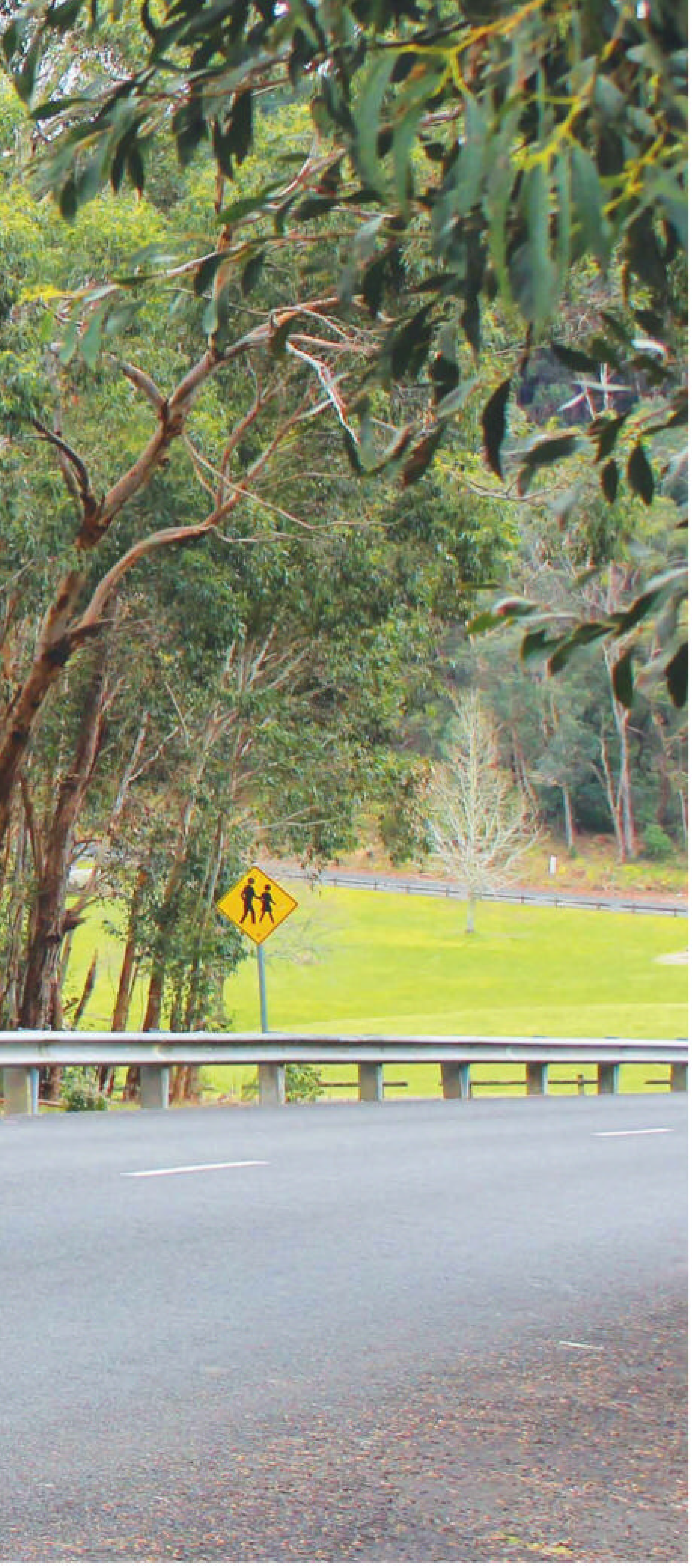

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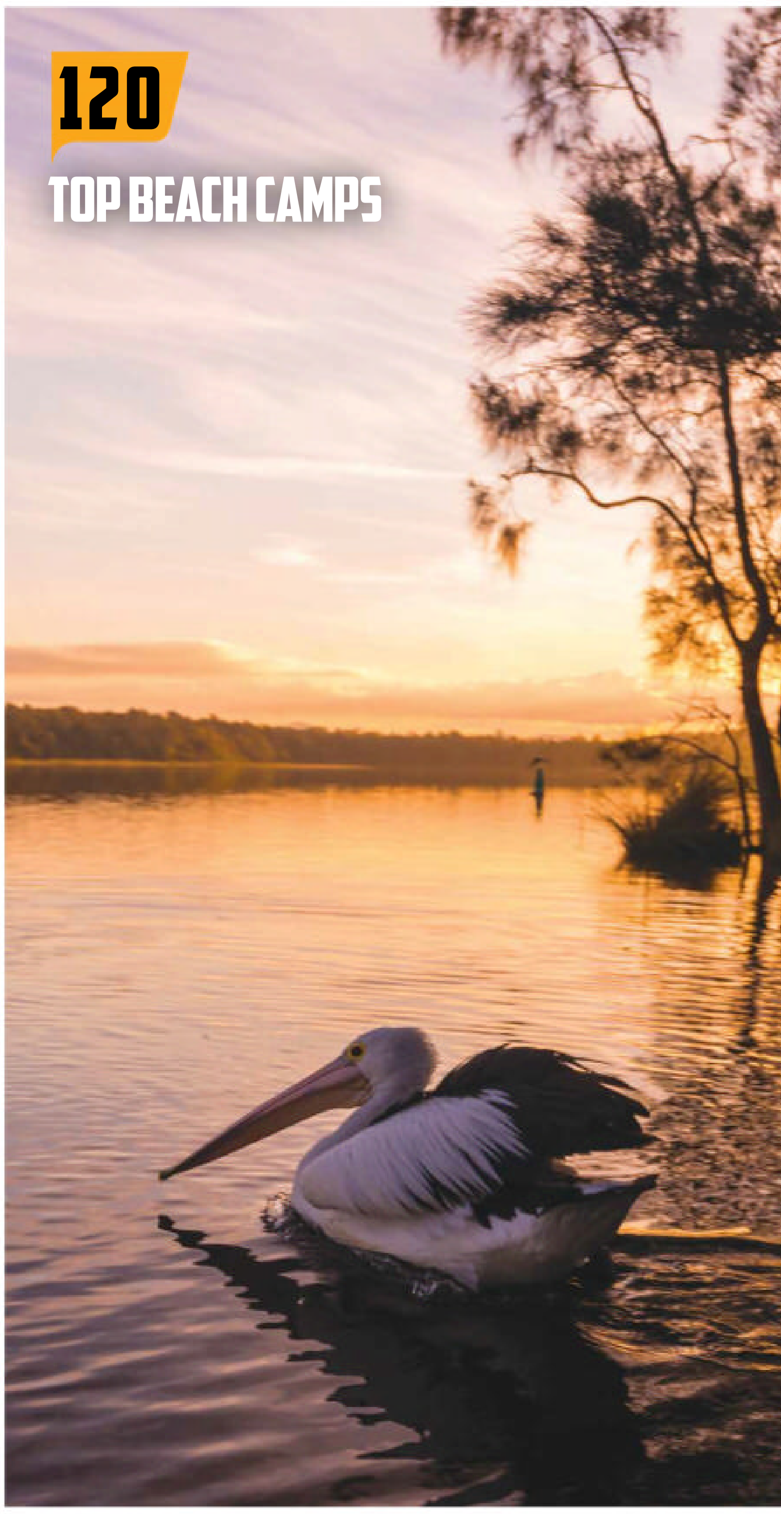

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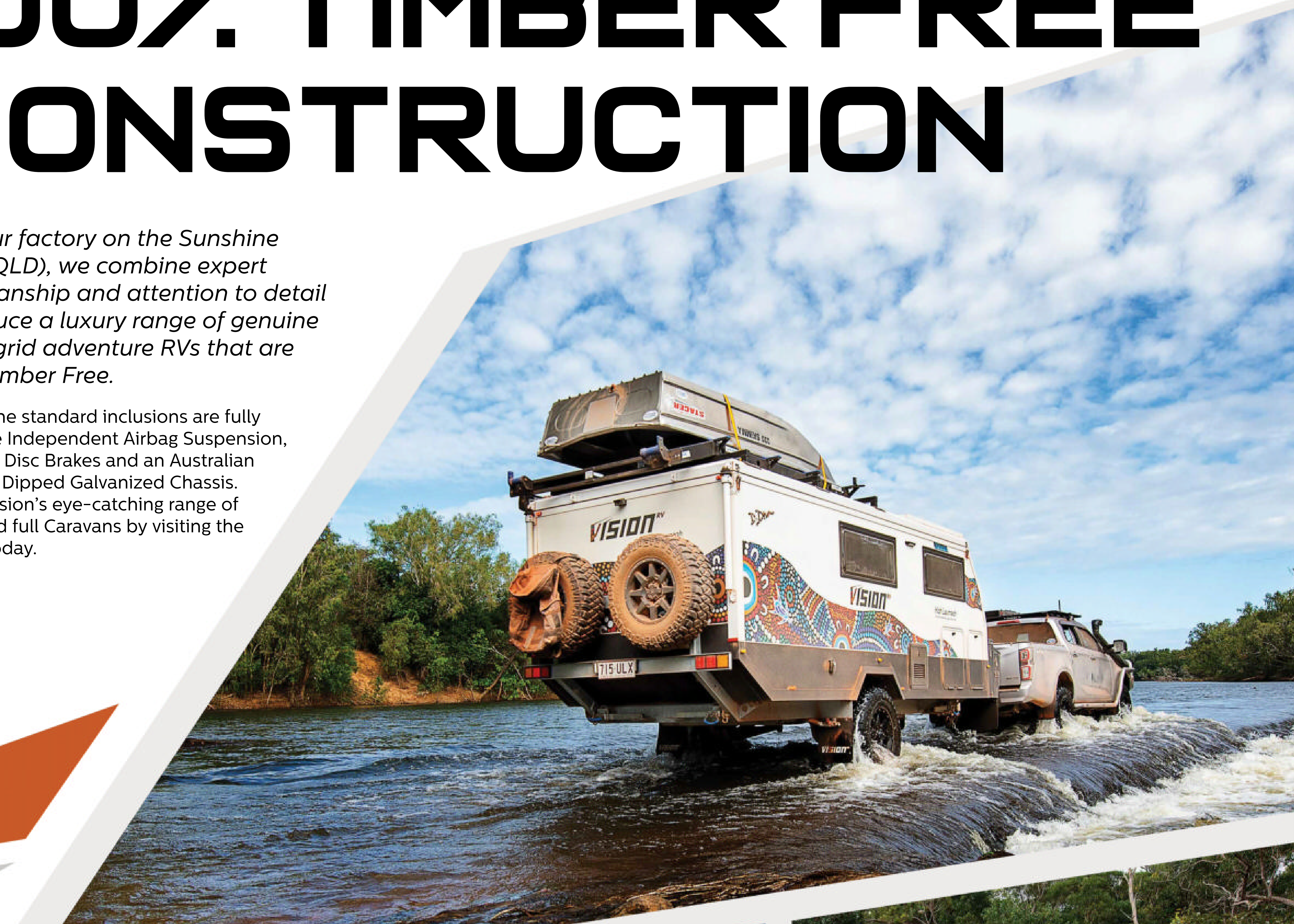

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THE FUTURE OF EVS IN AUSTRALIA

Australians believe the move to Electric Vehicles (EVs) is important to curbing climate change.

A survey of 1001 Australians by Savvy has revealed that 73 per cent agree that the move is important to reducing CO2 emissions and keeping global temperature rises to 1.5 degrees.

The survey found that younger Australians are more likely to buy EVs, but 79 per cent of those surveyed believe affordability needs to improve before they will purchase.

With the current prices, 40 per cent stated they may purchase EVs in the future, with seven per cent saying they intend to buy one within the next 12 months, and 30 per cent said they cannot afford one.

Influencing buyers' decision to change to an EV are improved government subsidies, improved infrastructure and improved driving range, but the biggest concern is still the price.

Overall, the survey found that 59 per cent want Australia to be 'all in' on EVs.

PARKES ELVIS FESTIVAL RETURNS IN 2022

Head over to Central West New South Wales this April, with the Parkes Elvis Festival set to return from 20 to 24 April 2022.

More than 200 Elvis and speedway inspired events will feature, with festival favourites Northparkes Mines Street Parade, Renewal of Vows Ceremony, Goodsell Machinery Miss Priscilla Dinner, free Cooke Park Main State Entertainment and Elvis Gospel Service also returning.

A range of new events will also showcase this year, such as a Speedway Exhibit of rare and classic race cars, racing stars meet-and-greets and virtual reality simulators, a Pin-Up Pageant for rock and vintage fashion lovers as we as Sons of Sun, a wild rock and roll play about Sun Records, Memphis.

The festival attracts over 24,000 fans, with this year's Festival theme being Speedway, with attendees encouraged to dress in theme.

Paul Toole, Deputy Premier and Minister for Regional NSW, said the NSW Regional Acceleration Fund will help the 2022 festival deliver a bigger program of events.

"The Parkes Elvis Festival is considered one of Australia's most iconic events and with a global media reach of more than 400 million people, this all helps to put a big spotlight on the region and bring welcome tourism dollars to local businesses," he said.

Other than music, music legend appearances and events, a host of workshops will be held where fans can discover vintage styling, revel in burlesque performances and even take a masterclass in drawing The King himself.

Tickets are on sale now at parkeselvisfestival.com.au, with accommodation options available, including camping and caravanning, in Parkes and surrounding towns.

SUNRISE CARAVANS PARTNERS WITH SAFIERY

Selected Sunrise Caravan models will now feature Safiery Victron Inverter/Charger Systems with lithium batteries.

Based in the Moreton Bay Region in South East Queensland, Sunrise Caravans' partnership with the Queensland-based Safiery will offer customers, what Sunrise Caravans claims, freedom and independence with access to power anytime and anywhere.

The partnership will also allow caravan owners the opportunity to experience more off-grid experiences, with the system allowing for in van and mobile monitoring so owners can know exactly where they are power and energy wise.

Steven Andonovki, Director at Sunrise Caravans, said they are excited to improve and enhance caravanning experiences for their customers.

"More and more Australians are choosing to venture at home and a lot of them are curious about the offroad and off-grid adventure," he said.

"That means, they need greater access to energy to keep them powered up at all times.

"We can offer that with Victron by Safiery".

The Sunrise Tropicana will be the first model to feature the new system, combining a 3000W inverter and 400A across the two lithium batteries, meaning the Victron system will power trips for hours, days and months.

Interested customers can head into a dealership and talk to a sales representative to learn more.

SAFIERY
SAFIERY

DON'T MISS THE WONDERDOME

WONDERDOME, the largest 360 cinema experience ever in Australia is being held in Sydney's The Entertainment Quarter until Sunday 30 January 2022.

This 'Pop Up' theatre combines fully immersive visuals with leading-edge technologies to dissolve the boundaries between digital and physical where audiences can experience a new reality.

Captivating crowds at Coachella and Burning Man in recent years, the extrasensory experience is currently in Australia where art, film and music fuse together to create a unique virtual reality experience – without the goggles.

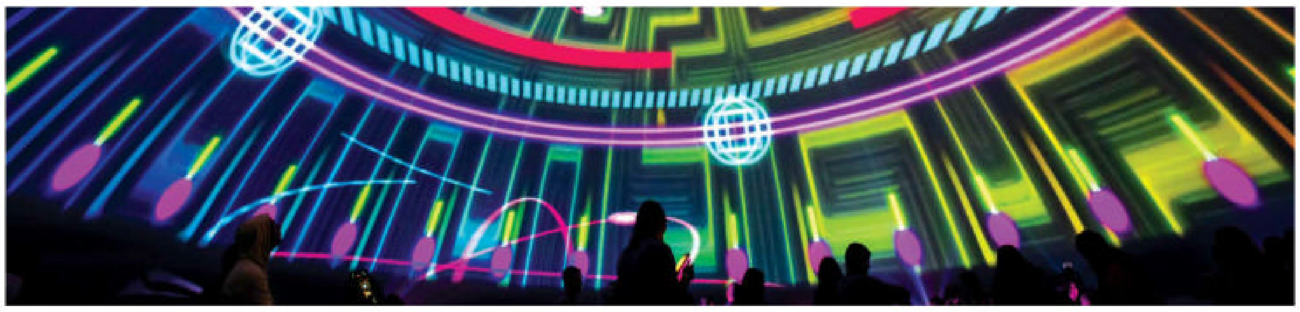
WONDERDOME Co-Founder, Chris Decker, said the boundaries of the screen are dissolved in the dome, allowing viewers to become part of the film.

"Viewers are immersed into multiple worlds, from thrilling rides through galaxies to emotive journeys navigating natural landscapes," he said.

The program features a catalogue of the world's most successful and thought-provoking 360-degree film experiences, meaning there is something for everyone, such as Coral Rekindling Venus, Flying Monsters, Dynamic Earth, Carriberrie, Labyrinth and Samskara.

There's also viewings for kids, with Dino Planet and Snowflake Adventure, the animated tales, The Meadow Racers and Magic Globe, or the educational Space Shapes.

To check out the program and to book tickets, visit wonderdome.com.au.



GETTING READY FOR THE AGE OF ELECTRIC VEHICLES

The Caravan Industry Association of Australia (CIAA) has highlighted that more needs to be done to help rural tourism operators connect with Electric Vehicle (EV) users.

CIAA has acknowledged the Australian Government's release of the Future Fuel Fund but is calling for a matched grants scheme for caravan parks and other regional accommodation providers to invest in charging stations that are suitable to charge all types of electric vehicles.

The CIAA has estimated that a $3 million investment from the government would provide an additional 2000 chargers across 1000 caravan parks in regional Australia.

Stuart Lamont, CEO of CIAA, said sometimes the only accommodation in regions are the caravan parks which are ideally placed, and therefore, are where EV charging points should be as EV owners base their road trip holidays on where they can charge their vehicles.

"Drive tourism accounts for 75% of all tourism in regional areas, charging infrastructure and activating the accommodation sector to install charging points will be crucial to help a long-term regional tourism recovery," he said.

Caravan parks simply don't have the capital to invest in upgrades to infrastructure due to the lack of travel the past two years, which Lamont said is where the government can assist.

"Regional tourism's biggest barrier is access, and with 2000 caravan parks around Australia, all with the space to add EV chargers, the government should utilise this," he said.

JAYCO AND ITS VANBASSADORS

Jayco Australia has extended its partnership with its first and longest standing Vanbassadors, ironman veteran Wes Berg and his wife, Jade.

The Gold Coast family of five are now Vanbassafors for the Jayco 19ft All-Terrain caravan, having been advocating for Jayco since purchasing their first RV in 2017.

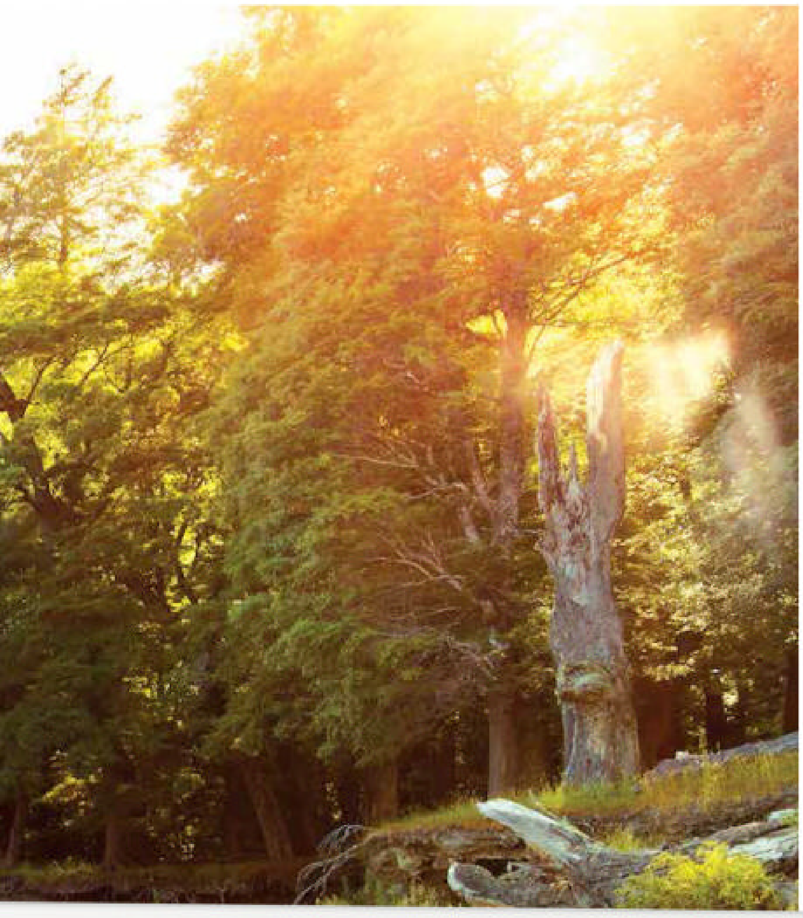
Jade Berg said moving from the Expanda Outback into the All-Terrain caravan means they can enjoy long-haul adventures and more time on the road.

"The Expanda Outback was an incredible van, and to be honest, we didn't think we would ever give up the spaciousness and the luxury of two double beds and two bunks it offered ... then we met the 19ft All-Terrain caravan and couldn't believe how insanely good it is!" She said.

By being Jayco ambassadors, the Bergs are able to share their story and showcase what can be achieved when travelling in a Jayco caravan.

More information about Jayco caravans, like the 19ft All-Terrain, can be found at jayco.com.au.

Jayco
ALL-TERRAIN



ISUZU
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ISUZU'S NEW D-MAX RANGE UPS THE GAME

Isuzu has bolstered the lifestyle ute range with the release of its 2022 D-MAX LS-U+ and the rest of its 2022 Isuzu D-MAX one-tonne ute range.

The LS-U+ Crew Cab Ute 4x4 Automatic comes with premium black leather-accented upholstery and interior trims, variably heated front seats, eight-way electric adjustment with electric lumbar support in the driver's seat, dual vanity mirror lights, an auto-dimming rear-view mirror and heated door mirrors, with the 2022 X-TERRAIN also coming with many of these features and a new, bolder interior.

Isuzu is also releasing another five variants, the SX Single Cab Chassis 4x2 with 1.9L RZ4E-TC in either Manual or Automatic, the SX Space Cab Chassis 4x2 Automatic, and the LS-M and LS-U Crew Cab Chassis 4x2 Automatics, while the SX Space Cab Ute 4x2 Automatic and SX Crew Cab Ute 4x4 Manual have been discontinued for 2022.

One of the main specification updates is an increased Gross Combination Mass (GCM) for all 4x4 models, including the X-TERRAIN, now rated at 6000kg, an increase of +50kg over the equivalent 2021 model.

With close to half of all Isuzu owners towing with their vehicle, according to an Isuzu customer survey, the LS-U Cub Chassis, LS-U+ and X-TERRAIN now come equipped with a factory fitted tow bar receiver as standard, which customers can tailor to their specific needs.

This includes options like a 7- or 12-pin plug, Anderson plug, electric brake controller, tow tongue insert with 50mm ball and weight distribution hitch, all of which are available from the Isuzu UTE Genuine Accessories catalogue.

Other updates include Lane Support System Switch for all models, the first fuel efficient and quiet RZ4E 1.9L turbo diesel engine in Australia, available in the Manual or Auto SX Single Cab Chassis 4x2, a Tub Liner for the LS and LS-U+, Rear Parking Sensors for the LS-M Crew Cab Ute, Alloy or Steel Cub Chassis Body for the LS-M and LS-U Crew Cab Chassis as well as other interior updates.

The 22MY D-MAX range comes with a Service Plus 6-7-7 program, with a six-year/150,000km warranty, up to seven years Roadside Assistance when serviced through IUA Dealers and a seven years Capped Price Servicing program.

The range was originally due to arrive in dealerships in the first quarter of 2022 but will now be available from 1 December 2021, all available in a selection of colours.

As a special drive away price for the launch, the SX Single Cab Chassis 4x2 1.9L Manual will price at $29,990 (normally $31,200), available in the first quarter of 2022, while the X-TERRAIN 4x4 Auto will have a special price of $62,990 (normally $65,900).

More information about the specs and prices can be found at isuzuute.com.au.

CIAA'S 30TH ANNIVERSARY NATIONAL CONFERENCE

The Caravan Industry Association of Australia has opened registration for its 30th anniversary National Conference .

The conference, sponsored by Dometic, will take place from 28 March to 1 April at the RACV Royal Pines Resort on the Gold Coast.

The event will include masterclasses and workshops, conference awards, a trade exhibition and gala dinner.

Anybody interested in attending can register their interest at caravanconference.com.au.

CIAA'S NEW NATIONAL BOARD MEMBERS

The composition of the National Board for Caravan Industry Association of Australia has been updated following an election by the state caravanning associations.

For the first time, almost half of the nominations were females, with four of the nine board members now women.

Kate Meldrum, Martin Cotterell and Grant Wilckens were re-elected, with Nikki Milne, Chris Woods and Margaret Shannon joining them, while Donna Cocking, Brad Slater and Gerard Waldron will continue to serve for another year ahead of a ballot in November 2022.

Stuart Lamont, CEO of CIAA, said they look forward to new debate ahead.

"The industry has many challenges and opportunities ahead of us, and we welcome the addition of three individuals just as committed and passionate about what lies ahead as those who have retired today," he said.

With **STUART LAMONT**

WOMEN RISING TO THE TOP

More women are appearing on vanning boards, to the benefit of all involved

I am not sure about you, but the women around me rule the roost, and my life is much the better for it. Whether it be a providing wise counsel when I am about to make a rash (and often) wrong decision or delivering emotional guidance and support through thick or thin, the women I know add a level of objectivity and support that makes me think, question, and evaluate my initial ideas and perceptions on a whole range of topics.

I am sure I am not the only one. Whether it be a wife, mother, sister, daughter, aunty, female colleague or other significant woman, their judgement is one to be valued and respected, with the added bonus that life should be happier with them being around. I am often reminded of two things that have always held me in relatively good stead: 'happy wife, happy life' and making sure there is plenty of input from the lady of the house when a new caravan is on the cards.

Caravanning and camping is a highly emotional (and financial) activity, and one that women are and should be highly involved and engaged with. Whether it be deciding what camper or caravan to buy, through to what campsite you should set up a tent at, the matriarch of the family has a big role to play. Indeed, a survey conducted of 2500 RV consumers found that women were more discerning than men when it came to warranty and after-market support, operating costs, materials used, heating and cooling systems, road handling, camp site set-up and interior caravan space. In fact, the only functionality which men rated higher in RV selection than women was entertainment and electronic devices.

I am reminded of the best-selling book by John Gray Men are from Mars and Women are from Venus which looks at differences in the way men and women think. Whether you subscribe to physiology as above, or alternative views around social conditioning, the fact remains that man and women when faced with a common set of problems, in many cases process and approach these differently. This is why Australia's largest companies, in even the most historically male-dominated industry sectors, have welcomed women into the boardroom and into senior leadership roles. To demonstrate this, there are now no ASX-200 companies that do not have at least one female board member among their composition.

It has, therefore, been a source of frustration and surprise that the caravanning and camping industry continues to be so dominated by men in senior positions of leadership and customer-facing sales and service, both within industry businesses and representative bodies. But this is changing and quickly.

At the recently held Caravan Industry Association of Australia Annual General Meeting, three of the six announced board members were women, bringing the total to four out of nine board members, well above the 26.8 per cent average (2018-19) of female directors in the non-public sector as reported by the Australian Bureau of Statistics in the Gender Indicators report. This was on the back of nearly 50 per cent of all nominations received being women. Importantly, each successful board member did so on merit and not based around a forced quota.

There have been trailblazing women in the past, but they have always been heavily outnumbered around the board table. The current mix is very much encouraged and welcomed, with programs being planned on how to empower more women in our industry to raise their profile and nominate for key industry positions. We are already seeing increased prominence by women as they carve their own career paths within leading industry businesses, and the emergence of highly motivated and successful young women are reflected in four of the past five National Future Leader winners being female. Three current state association CEOs are women, and the current president of Caravanning Tasmania is also an incredibly busy young woman. Highly talented women are taking leadership roles involved in technical, engineering and trade positions, including within our own compliance team. At the recently held Queensland trade awards, the salesperson of the year was also female, holding off a strong field of her male colleagues.

If as an industry we are to improve, and better supply products that meet consumer and community expectations and standards, this progression of prominent women holding leadership positions must continue to gain momentum. With so many opportunities ahead of us as a caravanning community, we welcome the influence and expected balanced debate that a diverse board will bring to industry direction and strategy discussions.

Stuart Lamont
Chief Executive Officer
Caravan Industry Association of Australia

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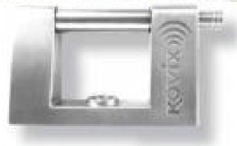
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With
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HIRING AN RV

This month, Malcolm looks at ways those waiting for their RV deliveries can hit the road in the meantime

There's no doubt that many people who struggled through the latest round of COVID-19 lockdowns are bursting to hit the road again. For those who already own an RV, it's mostly a matter of planning, packing up, and heading out.

For those that are either sadly waiting on an extended delivery time for their new RV – something very common at the moment – or don't have any immediate ownership plans, then that's not going to work.

When that's the problem, another possibility is to arrange to hire a motorhome (or caravan in a smaller number of cases) for the experience of RV travels. Indeed, this was something very popular with people who liked to travel overseas and rent a motorhome when they arrived at their destination – be it Auckland, Frankfurt, London, Los Angeles, or Toronto. Up until COVID-19 struck, it was something I used to do on a regular basis, particular just across the Tasman. Right about now, if I could get myself to New Zealand, I happen to know where there's a nice, Fully Integrated (A Class to you and I) Sunlight motorhome available for my use. Sunlight, in case you are wondering, is a German motorhome manufacturer. Sadly, that's not going to happen anytime in the next few months.

Just digressing slightly here, for any devotees of European-built motorhomes who cannot afford airfares (when they become available), then there are two rental companies in New Zealand – Wilderness and McRent – whom both have German-built motorhomes of all sizes on their books. A third, Walkabout Motorhomes, has the Italian equivalent.

In more recent years, an alternative to renting from commercial firms is to use organisations like Camplify, Mighway, ShareaCamper or Camptoo. All of these platforms can be thought of as the RV equivalent of AirBnB, in which a private owner's caravan/motorhome/camper trailer can be listed, along with the cost and the features.

ABOVE Relocation drives are becoming increasingly popular

There are advantages and disadvantages to commercial and private rentals. Some are obvious and some less so, and then there's pricing for instance that can go either way – time spent researching is vital.

The RV range for motorhome renters is often limited to between five and ten vehicles depending on the company. That said, the vehicles are often quite new, usually kept in good condition, and if they have a few years on the clock, the rental rates are reduced. Contrastingly, the range of private vehicles will be considerable and diverse with caravans, motorhomes, and camper trailers being readily available.

The other factor is that the age of owner vehicles will be quite varied, and the condition of the RV will depend on the care of the owner. That said, there are many owners who take a great deal of pride in their travelling accommodation.

Pick up locations definitely favour the private rental operators. They can be anywhere, not just in capital cities or near major airports. When looking for a private rental, it might be easy to find one near where you live. That said, if on a fly drive holiday, there's no doubt that the convenience of a pick-up near the destination airport is definitely a winner. One-way hires are more likely to be available from rental companies for obvious reasons. There may be a fee for that though and it pays to check rental costs each way.

Seasonal factors probably don't favour either method of renting, because during peak season demand on motorhome rental companies, it's also quite possible that private owners will want to use their RVs too.

Insurance is a consideration whether hiring from private owners or rental operators. The latter includes insurance premiums in the rental fees, but liability reduction is an add on. Some private owner platforms use a similar arrangement, and it pays to check the fine print and the cost.

Inclusions are a consideration. Generally speaking, both rental operators and private owner platforms have a minimum list of essentials that are included, items like bedding, crockery, cooking and eating items are considered as standard items, where items like camping chairs and table may be an add on or just not available. Don't make any assumptions – speaking from experience on a Canadian trip some years ago, bedding and towels were considered as extras in a rental motorhome and not included in the base price.

There are other factors of course but there are pros and cons for using either rental motorhomes or something from one of the private owner platforms and it's a good choice to have.

One other alternative is to do what's known as a 'relocation drive' for one of the motorhome rental companies. Check out websites like imoova.com for details. Hired motorhomes often end up in one place but are needed in another, and rental companies are happy for just about anyone to transport the motorhome at a nominal cost, and enjoy a few days cheap motorhoming along the way. Because of border closures, there are any number of these available at the moment. You have to be a little bit flexible with timing but by joining a few dots up, it's an inexpensive way to see the country.

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STAIN ON SOCIETY

Are you part of the larger problem?

Sitting in your favourite camp chair around the fire that you've nurtured from a few twigs to its current toasty state, it's time for a cold one. You twist a lid, pop a cork, or remove a lid with an opener. What happens next is your defining moment.

ARE YOU A LITTERER?

Going from our last few bush camping experiences, it seems that the all-too-common response is to drop the lid on the ground. Beer and soft drink caps are the most discarded items, so it's possible that males need the most education.

Waste management is an ongoing issue in the bush, from unburied human waste (code brown) and the associated confetti toilet paper, cigarette butts, beverage lids, and other general rubbish.

LEFT TO RIGHT The issue of littering is an exceptionally serious one, and it needs to be eliminated; Increasing littering fines may be a prudent measure

Bush camping is a privilege. In many cases, we're camping on private or public land in an area where you go to enjoy the peace and tranquillity of the area. By its very nature, there are limited facilities.

Look to the national park system to see how they deal with waste management. Long drop toilets are installed in key locations, and bins are often provided at the entry/exit of the park to help you do the right thing. There may also be firepits. But these facilities just increase the popularity of these camp areas. Some people, us included, deliberately pick areas that don't have facilities to avoid the masses.

This is the next social issue we need to deal with, like we have with grey water. We're now educated that it's not cool to run your external shower directly on the ground in bush campgrounds – it just creates a big mud pool for the next person. Bring a large silicone bucket or a custom shower pod to capture the water and dispose of it thoughtfully. Many RV friendly towns now direct you to dispose grey water into the dump point.

And then there's toilet training – educating travellers to bury their human waste. If you've ever camped in the general campground at Arkaroola and surrounds where the area seems to be one gigantic rock, unburied human waste is an all too familiar sight.

So, what can be done? Here's a few ideas:

THINK ABOUT IT!

What do you do with your lids? Are you a dropper? Do you pop the champagne cork into the night sky or put it on the end of the table where it's ultimately blown off or knocked to the ground? I'll often put lids in my pocket when in a food coma around the fire or just too lazy to move, and bin it later.

Avoid throwing into the firepit, whether it be roaring or not even lit. It's not a bin!

CANS ARE THE NEW STUBBIES

Cans make a lot more sense than stubbies for camping. They're easier to pack in the fridge, stack better, can be crushed after use, and take up less room in your rubbish. But the kicker is that the lid stays intact, so there's no lid disposal issue. Winner!

CALL YOUR FRIENDS OUT

If you see your friends doing the wrong thing, call them out. Whether it be littering with cigarette butts, beverage lids, and other faux pas, they need to be educated.

SECURE YOUR RUBBISH

While a lid may initially find its way to your camper bin, ensure you secure that rubbish bag overnight. Animals may ferret away in there, spreading it across the landscape and wind will do the rest.

INCREASE THE COST OF CAMPING

If we as campers can't do the right thing, then maybe the answer is to increase the cost of camping. Add site managers or camp hosts, install more bins and toilets, add fines for littering, and impart that cost on the user.

Like other waste management issues, beverage lid disposal has become another stain on society and unless we do something about it, these beautiful resources that we currently have access to may no longer be available.

Together we can do our bit to keep Australia beautiful and this includes considering beverage lid disposal amongst other waste management issues.

See you on the trails.

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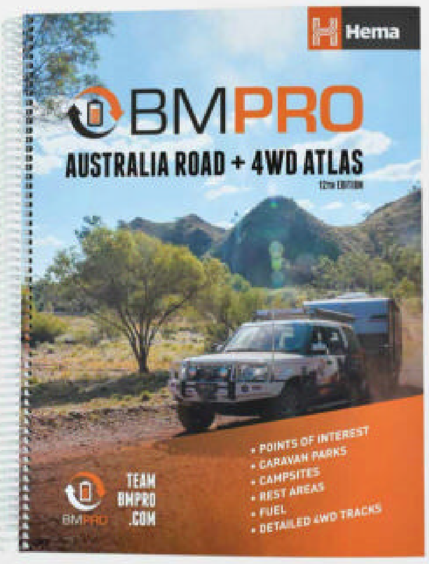

CHARGING UP!

Q Hi David,

I read with interest your article in the July edition on lithium batteries, as I am thinking of changing mine. What I would like to know is: will I have to change my charging system? I currently have BMPRO.

Thank you.
Regards,
Greg Cura

A Hi Greg,

Thanks for your question — it is certainly a hot topic right now as many RVers move to the newer technology of lithium for a range of reasons — including, but not limited to, weight, longevity, greater capacity and overall increased performance.

There are BMPRO systems out there that can be upgraded to lithium charging capability, depending upon the hardware and software version. Check with your RV Dealer as they will be able to assist in determining if upgrading is an option.

We would strongly advise that anyone who currently has a Sealed Lead Acid (SLA) AGM battery upgrade their charger if upgrading to lithium (LiFEPO4) batteries. We have seen and heard many stories of companies telling customers stories that it will work fine, and even one who told us that their battery could recognise the charger and adapt its internal BMS accordingly. This misinformation is dangerous and disappointing as customers will be let down when their new lithium battery either fails to perform or is damaged.

To elaborate upon this, there are two main reasons as to why upgrading to a lithium charger is essential.

Firstly, you want to maximise the usage of your new lithium battery. Utilising an AGM charger will not charge the new battery to its full capacity, as the charging software algorithm is different for both types of batteries. Most RVers purchase a 100Ah battery and at these prices, you want to maximise the power available. A lithium charger works on a constant voltage — constant current charging model as compared to most smart AGM chargers which are multistage, and once they reach a particular voltage, they move into 'absorption' mode which charges the last 10–20 per cent of the battery at a slow rate for limited time, never allowing a lithium to reach its full capacity.

Unlike AGM batteries utilising the inbuilt electronics Battery Management System (BMS), lithium batteries have much tighter controls over their voltage for a range of functional and safety reasons. A fully charged lithium battery will hold 100 per cent charge at around 13.4V and still hold approximately 20 per cent at 13V whereas at under this (12.8V), an AGM battery will be at 100 per cent. The software algorithm inside the charger uses a measurement of the voltage to determine which stage of charging is relevant. As the variation between the two battery voltages is so close, the charger can effectively enter the wrong mode of charging on a lead acid battery and not charge to full capacity.

The second (and more serious) reason for charging lithium batteries with a correct charger is because many lead acid chargers have multiple charging modes and one of these is an equalisation mode and another, a desulphation mode. The latter uses high frequency 'pulses' in an attempt to dislodge build-up on the internal lead plates. This is not required for lithium batteries, considering the different internal construction. Additionally, the equalisation made normally utilises a higher voltage than is required for lead acid batteries and as such, has the potential to force the BMS inside a lithium battery to switch off to protect itself. Depending upon the style of BMS inside the lithium battery, it can be difficult to then 'wake-up' the battery again once the correct charging mode is re-engaged, rendering the new battery essentially useless.

Greg, in summary, if you are going to invest in lithium batteries, then we would recommend investing in an appropriate charger so that you can maximise and protect your investment.

Safe Travels,
12V Guru

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UGRADING THE HITCH

LETTER OF THE MONTH

✉ I am considering upgrading my standard 50mm ball hitch as some constant wear is evident on the ball.

Ninety per cent of my travel with a 3-tonne van in tow is on the bitumen, but then regularly I will pull in to 'free camp' style country which certainly extends the articulation between van and ute! Also, when traversing corrugated gravel roads with dangerous washaways I am concerned about relying so much on the garden-variety 50mm hitches.

Do you think it is worthwhile investing in a stronger hitch for a traditional budget-conscious grey nomad like myself?

Thanks for your interesting and educational column,

Rob Barker

A *G'day Rob.*

If you are at the limit of articulation, you are possibly putting stress on the cast coupling and your drawbar and A-frame so you should look at coupling with more articulation. You do not want to stress cast alloy, used in most hitches, as it may fatigue and crack.

In my personal opinion, there is no better coupling than the DO35A from Cruisemaster, and typically my sentiment is shared around the team here and people in the industry.

They cost around $400 so are not the cheapest, but you can fit them yourself so your total cost will be in that region.

The next option I would suggest is an AL-KO 50mm Offroad Ball Coupling which will set you back closer to $300 and is also very good and an easy DIY.

I used both just last week and found the 50mm AL-KO Offroad hitch a bit harder to use – you need to align it more accurately and the release handle is awkward compared to the button on the DO35A.

Let us know which route you take and your thoughts, and, of course, safe travels,

Tim van Duyl

FRIDGE PONDERINGS

✉ Hi,

I was wondering if it is easy to replace a small fridge freezer combo with a larger fridge with a separate freezer? I have been looking to purchase a second hand caravan, but want a large fridge and can't quite afford the newer models that have this, so have been thinking about replacing the smaller fridge/freezer.

Thanks,
Trina Wilson

A *Trina,*

Let's assume the van can take the extra weight. As long as there is room then installing a larger fridge shouldn't be a problem. Your choice of a 12V compressor fridge or gas will depend on how much solar and battery power you have, but a gas fridge would be a relatively easy swap. I would get your local service centre to advise on fitting before you go too much further.

John

IMPORTED V. LOCAL

✉ Hi all at Postbag,

Just received a recent copy of Caravan World. I always look forward to First Words, and I whole heartedly agree with Mr. Ford regarding the build of European vans. They have always been far ahead of most Australian built vans, the same as with motor vehicles. It was always drummed into us buy Australian made cars and vans as they are built for our conditions. But there are now no locally built cars, and unless the locally built van industry drastically change their construction methods and quality, it too will come crashing down like our car production has. From experience, I know European roads are no better or worse than ours.

European and now Chinese built vans are showing the way and it's confirmed by your own testers, as the new Regent scores very high, as has the Snowy River, which still has one of the highest star ratings in past issues.

Your testers often mention warranty concerns of imported vans, but after discussing locally built vans with owners trying to have their big brand vans fixed under warranty is heartbreaking.

Hoping my opinions aren't too controversial, but we all need to shake up the local industry to survive and, more importantly, keep Aussies employed. Keep up the great magazine.

Safe travels to those that can.

Regards,
Emanuel Knol

A *Emanuel*

I'm not sure that I entirely agree with you with your take on European vans. Sure, some of the layouts are very user friendly, but I'm not convinced all of them are engineered for Australian roads. There are exceptions of course, but comparing jaunts headed for Blackpool to a drive along our corrugated outback tracks is a big ask. We proudly support the Australian industry, and we try to be as objective as we can with our ratings, but not all reviewers have the same conclusions as is seen in our annual Best Vans event.

Glad you enjoy the magazine,
John

IN THE FRAME

✉ Hi CW,

I am amazed at the high number of new caravans that are still being built with Meranti frames. Yes, it's a wonderful timber but it's imported from Indonesia and it comes from areas where orangutans struggle to live.

We are reminded often about the loss of habitat that is threatening our native animals and the animals of the world – so why are a lot of manufacturers that use this timber not converting to aluminium? Or is it that they don't know, care? Perhaps organisations such as WWF should highlight these manufacturers as anti-wildlife?

Warren Charlton

A *Warren,*

I'd have to say this isn't something I have previously considered. I checked with the Caravan Industry Association who advised us that consumers can actively influence change in the market by choosing to purchase caravans built with alternative framing over rainforest-sourced timber.

If the demand is there, industry will absolutely pivot to accommodate consumer needs and demands.

There are already manufacturers that have made a conscious shift to more sustainable production practices and products. Keep in mind, as a consumer there is an often an increased ticket price on these products, and the value of the product can also increase in kind.

John

LEAKY VALVES

Dear John,

I recently had a safety issue with my offside caravan tyre valve. While checking caravan tyre pressures I found a slow leak coming from the tyre valve of my offside wheel. When I took it for a replacement valve, the fitter said it had perished because the offside wheels of caravans are more exposed to the sun than nearside wheels and covered spare wheels.

I never thought this constant exposure of offside wheels would be the cause of a deflated tyre. My advice to other travellers is to keep your caravan wheels covered up whenever practical to hide them from the harsh sun rays.

Regards,
Ken Puffitt

A *Hi Ken,*

It might be the same theory that says daylight saving makes the curtains fade. However, tyres are one of the maintenance items many of us ignore and we should be checking condition every time we leave home. Old tyres are not safe. There's a date of manufacture on the tyre, and anything over ten years old should be replaced.

John

KEEPING THINGS LEVEL

Yesterday I was driving WA's infamous Indian Ocean Drive north of Yanchep when I caught up to a truck that was immediately behind a caravan being towed at 65-70km/h in a 100km/h zone.

Fortunately, after a few minutes, there was an overtaking lane and as the truck drew level with the caravan it started to sway so much that the rear of the van almost hit the truck in the adjacent lane. When my turn to overtake came, as I drew level with the swaying van I glanced across and immediately recognised the issue.

The tow vehicle was a LandCruiser 100 series and it's tow ball was much higher than it should have been which caused the van to travel 'uphill' at a steep gradient causing the single axel van to sway at anything above 65km/h.

Hopefully the rig made it safely to its destination. It surely would have been a white knuckle drive!

Ferg le Juge de Segrais

PROS AND CONS OF FRAMES

We are new to caravanning, in fact so new that we are still to take delivery of our van. We are trading up from a canvas tent on a trailer, so building materials was a key point of focus.

Timber frames, aluminium welded frames, aluminium huck-bolted frames, aluminium cladding, aluminium composite, sandwich fibreglass – the list keeps growing as manufacturers strive to create a point of difference with their construction to gain market share. Like all who have come before us, we had to negotiate advertising hype from functional reality to suit our requirements.

It appears that the caravanning world has split into two main factions – timber frames and non-timber frames – with the main argument against timber being its potential to rot. Valid point, and accepted, except the majority examples of rotting frames given involve earlier vans.

Just because a frame isn't timber doesn't mean it doesn't have negatives.

My reason for writing this letter is to ask *Caravan World* to do an article that explores the pros and cons of different construction materials and what the manufacturer should be doing to counter the negatives of the different constructions. The criteria for the exposé should be how the materials survive over the life of the van: deterioration by age and weathering, maintenance required for each type of material and repairs due to impact.

Two points stood out in our research and had significant impact on our choice:

1. The YouTube couple who pointed out that if you want to bolt an extra fan to the roof, wait till the morning so you can see the condensation lines of the framing. (insert shocked face emoji). The frames may not rot, but surely there will be long-term damage to the internal lining due to frequent condensation? (Questions: what should a manufacturer be doing to counter condensation?)

2. An older and very practical couple who have been vanning for a long time raised the point of impact damage in the form of trees. They own an older offroad van and say a timber frame with aluminium cladding is easier and cheaper to repair. Yes, they've had rot. No big issue, just take off the cladding, make the repair and reassemble. This raises the question of how the other construction materials fare in an impact from a tree branch.

We were faced with so many options we felt the more questions we asked the more we realised there were more questions to ask. At some point you have to stop asking and just buy one. Which we did only to be told we had a 12 month wait. So, instead of travelling I sit at home writing letters to the editor.

Regards
Paul Murray

A *Paul,*

All great questions. The February issue has a feature on caravan maintenance and hopefully we will shed some light on the issues you raise.

John

WIN! THIS

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How to win

If you're stumped by a technical or towing problem, send your question to **submissions@emprisegroup.com.au** with 'Tech Talk' in the subject line or send a letter to *Caravan World* Tech Talk, 3 Wyman Place, Braeside, Vic 3195. All entries must include your full address (not for publication).

TRAVEL HAPPY

We shine the spotlight on caravanners, their rigs, and their travel tales

SEND PICS TO WIN

Joining one of the many Silo Art Trails around the country, reader Adrian O'Donoghue grabbed this snapshot at a picturesque spot nearby.
"This photo was taken at Green Lake near Banyan, Victoria, during our overnight stay while on the Silo Art Trail."

Reader Steve Gibbs stopped on his travels through Victoria's coast to take this happy snap of his set up.
"This is our UK imported 2009 Swift Sterling Eccles Elite caravan towed by our 2012 Volvo XC60 D5. This combination tows very smoothly and the fuel economy is excellent. We love it!

We're parked in front of the historic Inverleigh Hotel, located in the small township of Inverleigh, just outside of Geelong, Victoria."

Reader Donnella Faulks sent in this brightly coloured picture, reminding us all that Australia isn't just a dry, red land!
"Travelling through the Mallee recently. It was so colourful with plenty of wildflowers and crops. We are in love with the western districts of Victoria."

KING WAVES KILL

This warning still rings true today, so readers Mark and Leith Duperouzel sent in this picture, snapped on travels through Western Australia.
"Just us trolling up the west coast admiring the coastline at the Blowholes, Point Quobba."

WIN!

This month's winner will receive a Purple Line Saracen Ultra Hitch Lock valued at $189. Saracen Ultra is a highly visible, compact, high security lock which works both hitched and unhitched to keep would-be caravan thieves at bay. It fits to most standard 50mm ball hitches on caravans, camper trailers, boat and car trailers, and even work trailers. **For more information about this and a host of other vanning accessories, visit purpleline.com.au**

→ **Readers Greg and Cheryl Gin hit the road this year for a semi-big lap in a 2020 Crusader Serenity with our 2015 Jeep GC Overland, both of which behaved superbly.**

"After 127 days and 15,856km we have finally returned home! We travelled with four other vans at times, heading up the middle from Kerang, Victoria, to places like Coober Pedy, Uluru, and Kakadu. We then went down the West Coast, including Horizontal Falls, Exmouth, Cervantes and Albany, then back along the Nullarbor.

One place that took our fancy was Penong on the Nullarbor in South Australia with its Windmill museum! Iconic and unusual!"

→ **Readers Peter Dowling and Sue Alexander, stopped to sample a bite and a drop, before hitting the road again in their Everest Sport and Jayco Journey Outback.**

"Leaving Bests Winery near Stawell, Victoria, having enjoyed a very pleasant lunch."

→ **With their original plans off the table thanks to border closures, readers Chris and George Taylor headed off a little closer to home.**

"We could not get to Western Australia, so we toured around Western Victoria instead! One of many highlights was visiting the numerous Silo Art Trail works.

Pictured is our Road Owl, Ranger, and the Silo Art at Patchewollock in the Mallee."

→ **While travelling the highways and byways of Australia, readers Andy and Julie Wyatt got to take in some beautiful scenery all by themselves.**

"We found our own Murray River waterfront site all to ourselves in October 2021 while travelling in our LandCruiser and Option RV caravan and loving life! Beautiful scenery with kayaking and fishing metres away, and the birdlife was incredible!"

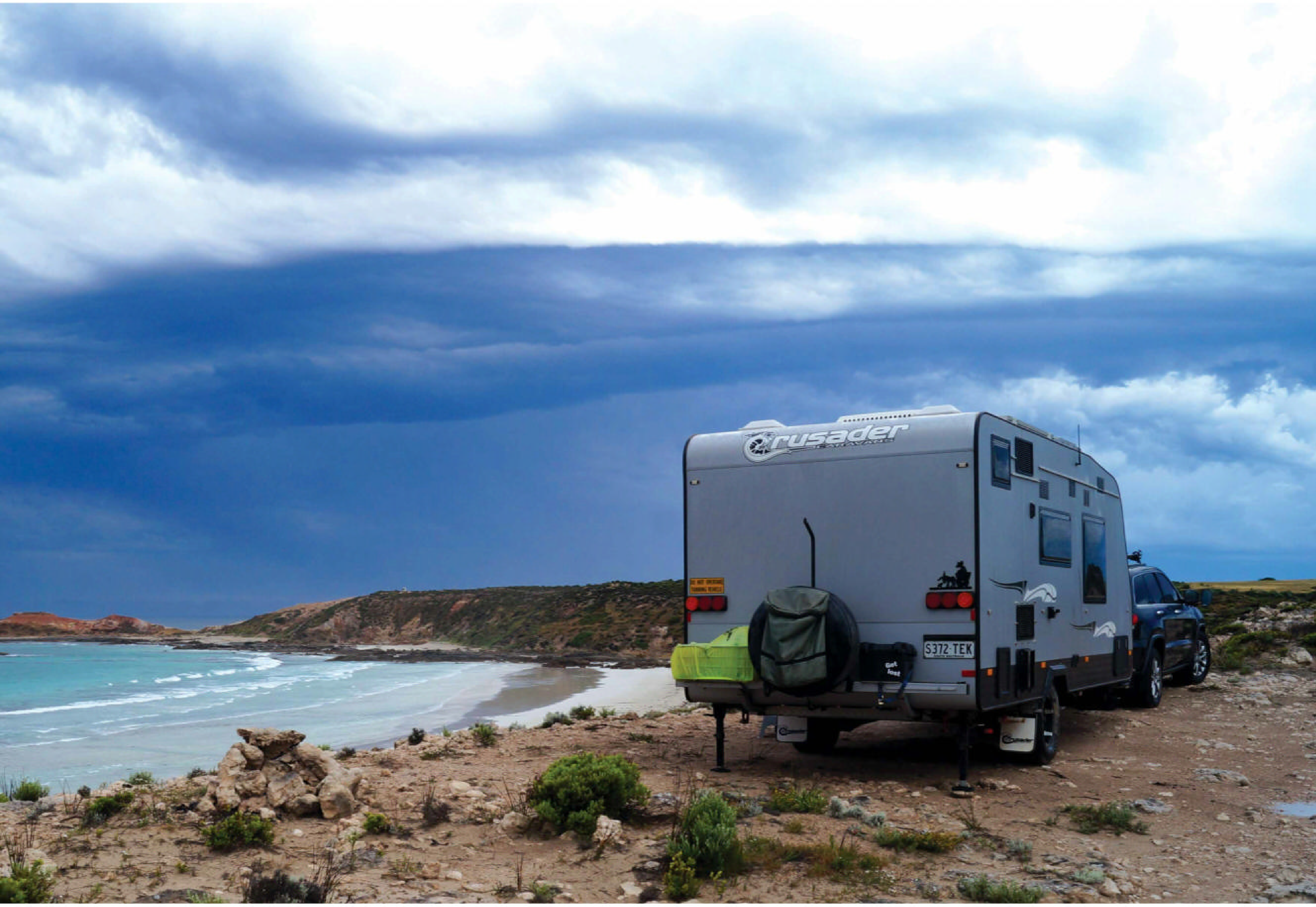
HOW TO WIN

Just email your most travel-inspiring picture (2–3Mb) of yourself, family, or friends with your rig along with a brief description to submissions@emprisegroup.com.au with 'Readers' Rigs' in the subject line, or send a print to *Caravan World* Readers' Rigs, 3 Wyman Place, Braeside VIC 3195. All entries must include your full postal address (not for publication). Photo submissions may also appear on caravan.hemax.com.

This month's Readers Rigs winner, Brenton Bowley, captured the darker side of travel that we all do our best to avoid.

"No place to run, no place to hide, so we may as well bunker down and watch the coming storm at Drummond Point on the west coast of Eyre Peninsula.

Luckily there was no howling wind or hail – just a torrential downpour and a lightning show that lasted for several hours."



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BEATING THE SAND BOG BLUES

Driving a long sweep of beach or through our vast deserts is one of the great experiences for any traveller. But to do it safely and well takes some knowledge and skill.

***Words** Ron and Viv Moon **Pics** Supplied*

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT When tackling dunes, like these in the Simpson, its best to be prepared; Let down your tyres to reduce the chances of getting bogged; Consider if your RV is up to sand driving

I've been bogged more times than most, as our esteemed editor pointed out to me in a recent phone call. And it's true! You name a desert in Australia, or a stretch of popular 4WD beach and I've most probably been bogged on them!

So, what have I learnt in all those years and experiences? Plenty, I've got to say! And when you put a camper or van on the back, you'll need all the skill and experiences you can muster to drive sand well.

TYRES

Tyres play a very important role, especially when travelling off the blacktop. Most OE tyres are softer 'P' rated or 'Passenger style' constructed tyres, so when replacing those tyres that came with the vehicle straight from the car dealership, go for a Light Truck (LT) constructed tyre as these are stronger and more durable. Also choose an AT type tread pattern, which makes for good all-round traction in vary situations.

My favourite tyres are American-made rubber as I reckon they know more and test more in offroad situations than brands from other countries – BFG, Cooper, or Mickey Thompson make for a great start in the rubber race.

One more thing. A good sand tyre has a relatively large rolling diameter so going tall is better than going wide.

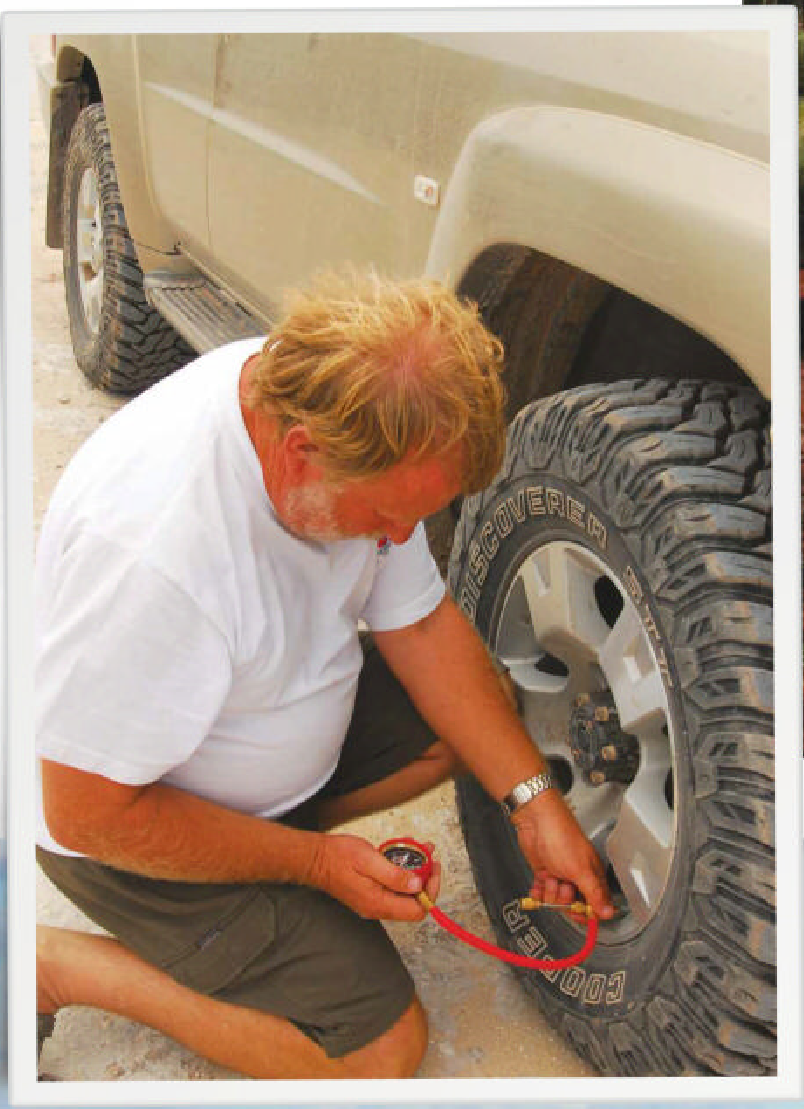
TYRE PRESSURES

Tyre pressures are the single most important aspect of sand driving, so be prepared to change your tyre pressures regularly, depending on the conditions. Always carry a good tyre pressure gauge (not a stem gauge) and a good air compressor with you.

Lowering tyre pressures makes the going easier and the vehicle's engine will work less as the tyres roll over the top of the sand instead of pushing through it. Not only that, the ride will be more comfortable and you'll do less damage to your vehicle and the track.

Remember to watch your tyre pressures. You may start off in the cool of the morning with the pressures at 15psi but in the heat of the afternoon, when the sand is softer as well, tyre pressures could have climbed to well over 20psi making the vehicle struggle and the ride harsher.

Always lower the tyre pressures to 140kPa or 20psi as a starting point. My son, who runs Moon Tours (moontours.com.au), specialising in taking camper trailers and hybrid vans into the remote outback, reckons in sand,



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Different types of sand (outback vs beach) can call for different things; Lower your pressures before heading onto sand; You want more area of the tyre in contact with the ground; Travelling in a convoy is a good idea as you can be pulled out if you get bogged

> "Tyre pressures are the single most important aspect of sand driving, ***so be prepared to change your tyre pressures regularly***"

anything with a '2' in front of it, is too high as far as tyre pressures go.

On the soft beaches of Robe in SA, or the Sandy Cape run in Tasmania, you may find you'll need to go as low as 70-100kPa (10-12psi) to get through. Amongst the dunes of the Simpson where the track conditions rarely vary much over the course of the day (except for the sand getting hotter), 18-20psi is a good starting point. Once again, if the sand is hot and dry, you may have to go lower. On the varying conditions of the Canning Stock Route where one hour you are amongst big dunes and another on rocky gibber-type country (and with a heavily loaded vehicle), 140-170kPa (20-25psi) may be a better compromise. But don't be afraid to go down in pressure if you find you are having issues in the sand dunes.

With a trailer or camper, even a large one such as an AOR Matrix or Track T4, we've found dropping the tyre pressures to 14psi (100kPa) or lower, works pretty well. Trailer tyres are just rolling along and the risk of a puncture is a lot less than the driving wheels of the tow vehicle. With my Trakmaster and my previous Tvans, I run the tyre pressures on the van between 12 and 14psi whenever I'm offroad in the desert or beach, where speed is kept below 60km/h or so.

With low tyre pressures, though, comes a decrease in control and handling. Keep speeds down to a reasonable pace even when you're on a good section of track or beach. Sudden turns may roll the partially deflated tyre off the rim or allow sand to get between the bead and the rim which means you'll have a slow air leak and eventually a flat tyre. A tyre pressure monitoring system helps here with slow leaks, especially on trailers where a slowly deflating tyre can be hard to pick up. With low tyre pressures, there will also be more body roll, caused by the tyre's sidewalls flexing.

Once back on a good dirt road or blacktop, where you'll increase your cruising speed to 80km/h or more, you'll need to pump up your tyres to 25-30psi (170-210kPa) on dirt roads, or normal highway pressures for the blacktop.

BEACH DRIVING

Beaches are best driven when you can drive on the 'firm pack' between the high and low tide marks. That makes low tide, or close to low tide, the best time to drive on any beach.

Above the high tide mark, the sand can be very soft, making it pretty tough going. As well, local nesting birdlife and, in places like the west coast of Cape York, nesting turtles, all set their nests above the high tide mark. Some beaches get closed to vehicle traffic then, and for good reason. If forced to drive above the high tide mark at any time, watch out for the nests of our feathered friends and their turtle mates.

Here's some more tips:

- Stick to any existing wheel tracks — the vehicle in front will have packed the sand down a little, making it easier for those following.
- Avoid sudden changes in direction or acceleration. Coast to a stop and use the brake sparingly.
- If you need to do a 'U' turn, the best way on a beach is to gradually work your way up to the high side of the beach and then turn down the slope. Do the turn in one sweep over the firmer sand.
- Winter storms often create steeply sloping beaches which are difficult to drive on and are generally softer than a flat beach. Beaches are much more gently inclined at the end of summer and are a darn sight easier to drive.
- Quicksand can be found on ocean beaches and in central Australian river beds. These sections of water mixed with sand can be extremely dangerous and it's not unheard of a vehicle completely vanishing. Some beaches (eg. in the south-east of SA approaching the Vic border and around the 'Rocks' on Fraser Island) and seemingly dry riverbeds (eg. the Finke on the way to Boggy Hole) are notoriously bad, so take heed.
- Watch for creeks and streams that exit out across a beach. Eli Creek on Fraser Island, Qld, the streams crossed on the way to Sandy Cape, Tas, and the creeks on the northern end of Cable Beach at Broome, WA, are just some examples. These are often hard to see, sudden and sheer sided, and hit too fast you'll come to a very quick stop, often with dire consequences.
- Such streams are often too deep to cross above the high tide mark as a small lagoon forms and you are forced to cross where wave action is washing up the beach. The best time for such crossings is as close to dead low tide as possible. The water is shallower and the wave action least. Still, this can be hairy and demands good timing so you run the crossing between waves.

BASIC SKILLS OF SAND DRIVING

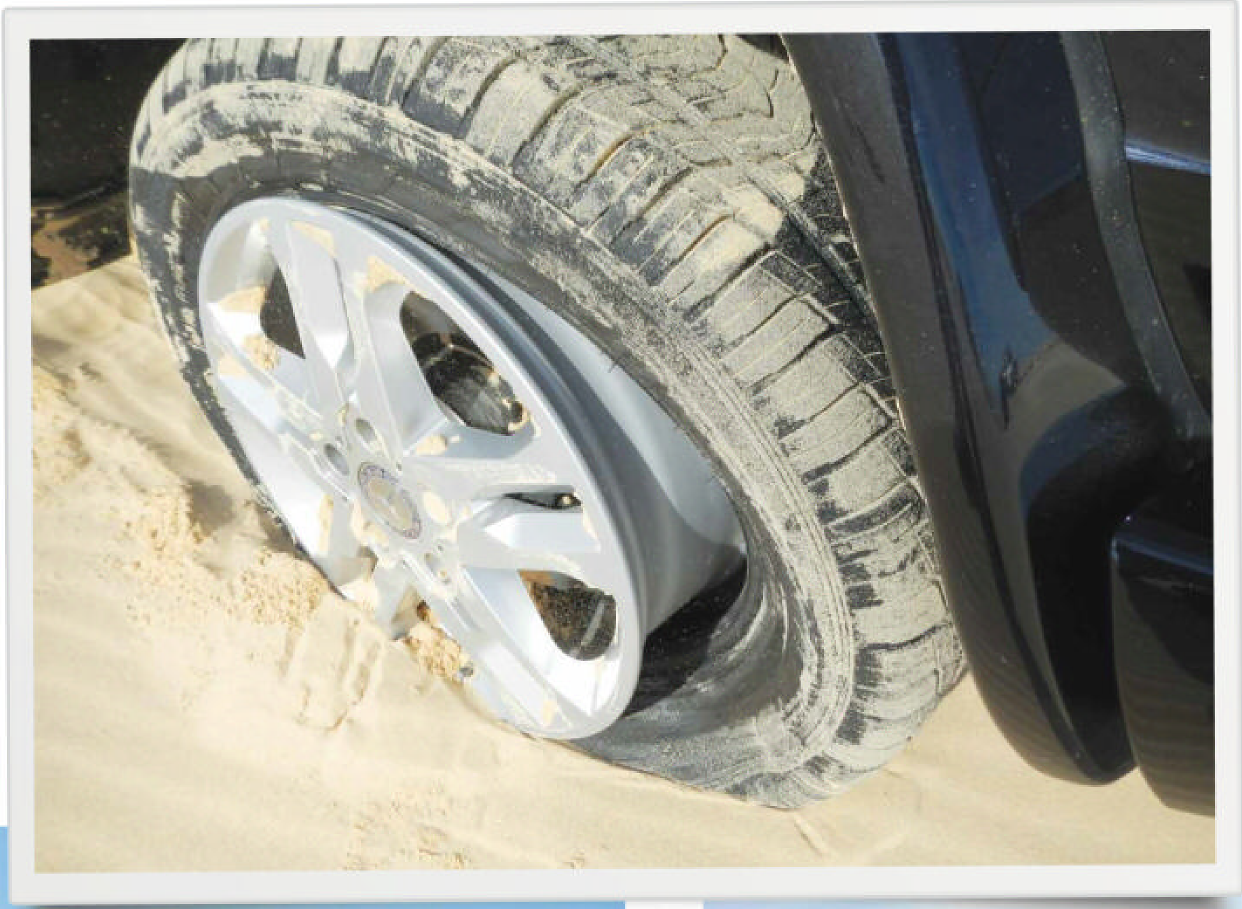
Keep a close watch on the ever-changing sand scene in front of you as sand can hide many hard-to-see traps which can quickly bring you to a stop.

When the sun is high in the sky, trying to read the sand can be difficult – it's like being snow blind. Few shadows are cast and in bare sand dune country dips, gullies and walls of sand are almost impossible to see.

Speed and flotation are the keys to success in sand. High ratio 4WD is generally the way to go, unless you're in the real thick stuff or trying to climb dunes (like Big Red out of Birdsville) where low ratio 3rd gear is a good starting point.

Once you become bogged, slip into low ratio, first gear, no matter what, to get you out of the mire. Don't forget, with modern vehicles, once in sand you may need to switch off the stability control – some vehicles do it automatically when you select low ratio.

CLOCKWISE FROM BELOW Travel to conditions, including your speed, so this doesn't happen; Pay attention to signs before heading onto the sand; This is what you want to avoid; Prepare for varied surfaces and tyre pressures by carrying an air compressor



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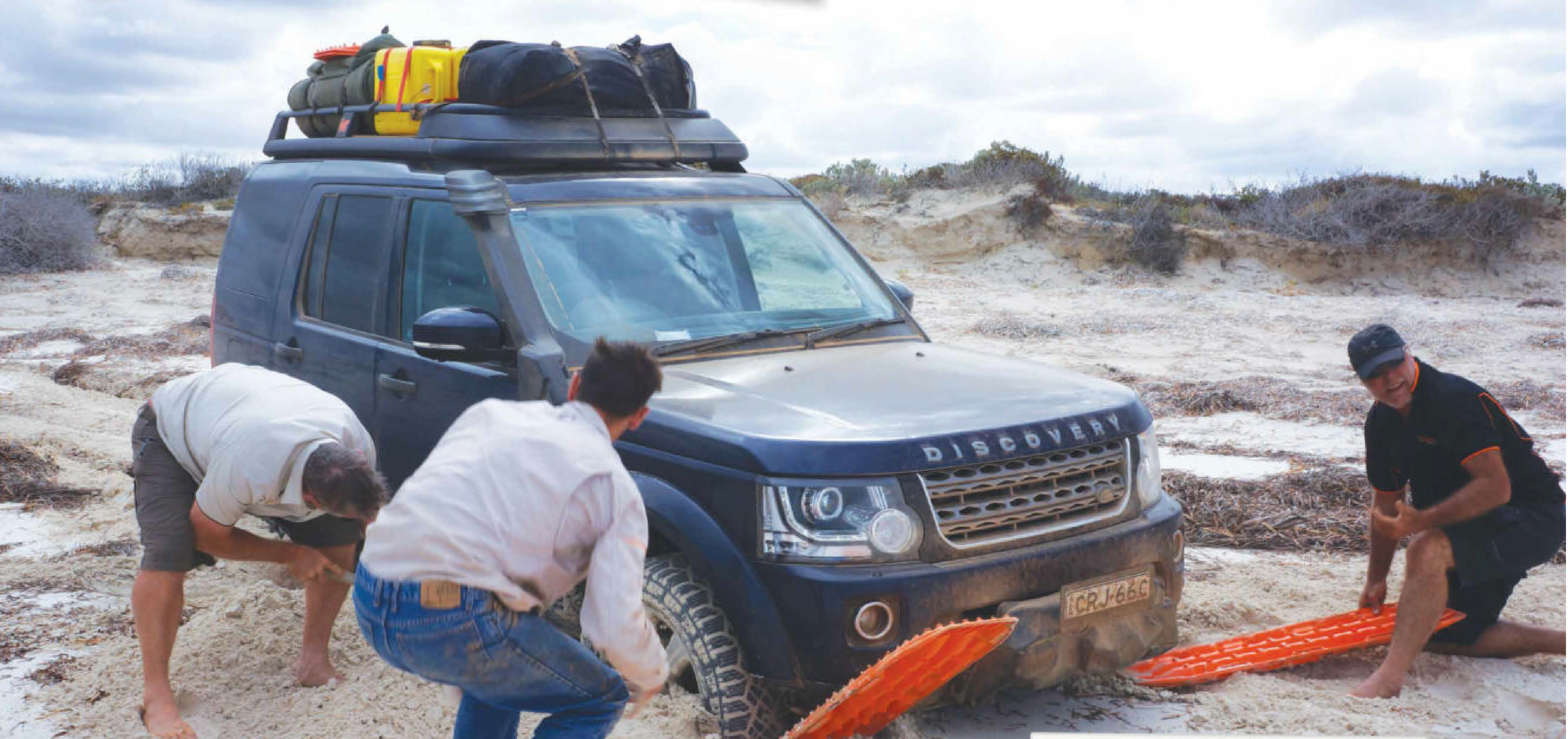

WHEN YOU ARE BOGGED

If you become bogged, select low ratio and rock the vehicle backwards and forwards. The idea is to build up a small stretch of hard-packed sand that you can use to accelerate off from. Don't spin the wheels.

Here's where a set or two of MAXTRAX will come in handy. They are the best self-recovery item you can have, and you cannot have too many of them! Six is good if you are towing a camper or van. Clear the sand away from each wheel and build a short ramp with the MAXTRAX for each wheel to run up so the vehicle is not trying to climb out of a steep sided ditch. If that doesn't work and you haven't got someone to pull you out, it is either a winch job or a more concentrated effort at digging and making the base firmer and longer with the MAXTRAX. A bullbag or air jack may also help to lift the vehicle and help fill in the bog hole under the wheels.

There's one piece of recovery gear that is hard to beat, and that is another vehicle! And every vehicle should carry a snatch strap – the latest soft shackle systems from MAXTRAX or ARB are hard to beat and are the safest to use. Still, whatever you have, make sure you know how to use them – they can be deadly!

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Existing tracks are likely to have the sand packed down slightly; Carry equipment to get yourself out; Monitor tyre pressures along the way; Don't spin your wheels or you're likely to sink deeper; Sand flags are needed in some areas for good reason; Keep an eye on your speed

DRIVING THE DESERT (OR BEACH) DUNES

In the Simpson Desert, it's mandatory that you fly a sand flag. And it's a bloody good idea whenever you are in sand dune country, whether on the Canning or behind a beach. That helps give any on-coming traffic a warning of your presence.

Here's more tips:

- Tackle dunes head on and exercise caution on steep slopes — don't get side on.
- As you approach a dune, get a little run up so that as you hit the base of the dune, you are in the peak torque rev range of the engine. Be in either 3rd or 4th low ratio, or 2nd or 3rd high ratio, depending on how steep and tall the dune is.
- If you don't get over, don't try and start off in a lower gear from halfway up the hill — you'll only burn a clutch out or overheat a torque converter. Back right down and try again, maybe with even a little more momentum than previously — don't overdo it though!
- On downhill slopes, use the brake sparingly, if at all. Keep the nose of the vehicle pointing downhill. If the vehicle does tend to slew sideways, a little acceleration will keep the wheels rolling and the vehicle pointing in the right direction.
- Watch your speed as you crest a dune and button off if going too quick — it may be a lot steeper on the other side!

CLOCKWISE FROM BELOW Make sure you have the equipment to get yourself out if travelling solo; A jack of some sort can come in handy to get the wheels clear

Another item worth thinking about if you are towing in sand often is the Trailer Skid by MAXTRAX. When bogged, the jockey wheel can be located into the skid, helping no end with the recovery of the van or trailer.

THE FINAL WRAP

'If you haven't been bogged, you haven't been four-wheel driving', or so the saying goes. With a trailer, be it camper trailer, a boat trailer or a bigger van, acting a bit like an anchor on the back of the tow vehicle, getting bogged is easier than ever. Be prepared, because there'll be times, no matter your skill, experience, or equipment levels, that you will become stuck.

Don't panic (not that easy on a beach with an incoming tide, I gotta say) and work safely towards getting out of your predicament. The rewards of desert camps and beach sojourns make the effort worthwhile!

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JUMP START YOUR CAR!

By iTechworld

Lithium technology is improving all the time, and West Australian, family-owned and operated company iTechworld has been at the forefront of lithium storage batteries and lithium jump-starters for the last 14 years. Jumper cables were the most used tool for jump-starting a flat battery. If the connection is incorrect, it is possible to cause expensive electrical damage to the car and its battery, causing thousands of dollars in damage.

With all the risks associated with jumper cables, iTechworld brought lithium car jump-starters to the Australian market, revolutionising the way people start vehicles and making the process of jump-starting a car a safe operation.

The JS80 is iTechworld's new flagship lithium powered jump-starter. The JS80 has been designed and developed in Perth and utilises an ultra-safe design which prevents any errors occurring. With no less than seven safety features, including spark-proof technology and reverse polarity protection, the JS80 is the smart, secure, and straightforward way to start a vehicle.

The primary function of JS80 is to jump-start a vehicle with a flat battery with minimum fuss and without relying on a second vehicle. The JS80 will holds its charge for six months and will sit happily in a glove box awaiting use. Using the JS80 to start a car is as simple as one two three. One, connect the HD clamps to the JS80. Two, connect the clamps to the battery and press the jump-start button. Three, start the vehicle.

The secondary function of the JS80 is to provide a portable power supply. The JS80 has two quick-charge 3.1 Amp USB ports which charge mobile devices like a smartphone, tablets, e-watches, headphones and more. Modern appliances charge via USBC, and the JS80 is up to the task thanks to its 60w PD USBC input/output. The JS80 can charge and run modern laptops such as a Mac Book. The JS80 has a 12v output which allows 12v appliances to run directly from the jump starter, such as tyre compressor pumps, small inverters, 12v lights, 12v fridges and more. The JS80 has pass-through charging which allows the JS80 to charge and discharge at the same time. Run a 12v fridge from the JS80, charge the JS80 simultaneously via the vehicles 12v cigarette socket.

The JS80 has an in-built tactical grade LED torch (500 lumens). A tactical grade torch is usually associated with the military, police, or security. Having a torch that you can rely on ensures you are never left in the dark again.

Everyone should have a JS80 in their glove box. Whether you are using it to supplement your power needs on a camping trip or you are using it as an emergency device for when you have a flat battery, the iTechworld JS80 is the one-stop device for you. Never worry about your car battery going flat again. The JS80 will jump start any car on the market, including yours!

The JS80 3000A Jump Starter will start any car or 4wd!

iTECHWORLD.COM.AU

Great Southern Land

Brochure blue waters, lounging kangaroos and long stretches of white pearl beaches — no photoshop is required for this scenic coastal drive

Words **JULIA D'ORAZIO**
Pics **JULIA D'ORAZIO AND TOURISM WA**

Just say Esperance and many familiar with the Western Australian town would conjure the eye-catching yet remarkable marriage of Australia's most-loved symbols.

Along the coastal town's doorstep is one of the most iconic 'Straya sights: nonchalant kangaroos sunbathing along its snow-white beach, Lucky Bay, in Cape Le Grand National Park, epitomising how exotic and incredible the Australian wilderness can truly be – and that's just one lucky locale.

Some 696km south-east of Perth, Esperance is one of the State's most visually spectacular destinations. Embraced by the Southern Ocean and Recherche Archipelago, the town is surrounded by marvels, even if some of those are – in every sense – out of this world.

But beyond its sweeping sceneries of towering cliffs, rocky headlands, a Barbie-pink lake and its postcard-perfect turquoise beaches, Esperance still manages to impress in other ways.

DIVING INTO THE PAST

"Let's do the whole shebang," I cheerily told my dad as we arrived at Esperance, continuing our road-tripping adventures along the Southern Ocean coast.

Taking cues from its hard-to-miss 'Whale Tail' sculpture along its foreshore, I was ready to uncover the southernmost city's past.

Over 14,000 people call this coastal hub home, and just by walking through its low-rise main streets, it was evident the town oozed country charm. But like many towns, it also had its fair share of peculiar sights.

Relics of the past, such as a 9.5m decommissioned Leopard Army tank, rest near the War Memorial. So too, does a memorial to the first wind farm featuring a giant wind turbine. And there's a life-size replica of the prehistoric monument Stonehenge just out of town – odd.

Then there's the Museum Park Period Village, home to an assembly of relocated 19th and 20th-century historic buildings. Strolling through the village – a stone's throw away from the main drag – almost feels like being transported to a section of an amusement park dedicated to yesteryear, thanks to its beautifully restored facades.

But perhaps the town's most unusual attraction is one that Esperance didn't ask for.

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE The snow-white sand of Lucky Bay in Cape Le Grand National Park; a quick recharge at Coffee Cat on Esperence Foreshore; Don McKenzie's Lighthouse Sculpture on Taylor Street Jetty

Besides being home to a hodgepodge of local trinkets, Indigenous artefacts and shipwreck items, the Esperance Museum is home to one of the most famous pieces of junk.

On 12 July 1979, Esperance became part of space history when the first United States' space station, US Skylab, crashed along the coast after spending six years orbiting Earth. The 36m space vessel's blazing return caused debris to be scattered across the Nullarbor and Eastern Goldfields. As a result of NASA's misfire landing, Esperance was put on the world map – cheekily, the Shire of Esperance sent a $400 litter bill to NASA, which wouldn't be paid until 30 years later after a Californian radio station raised money from listeners to pay off the controversial debt.

But it's Esperance who has cleaned up in more ways than one, with large fragments of Skylab, including an oxygen tank and other scorched scraps now prized pieces of history.

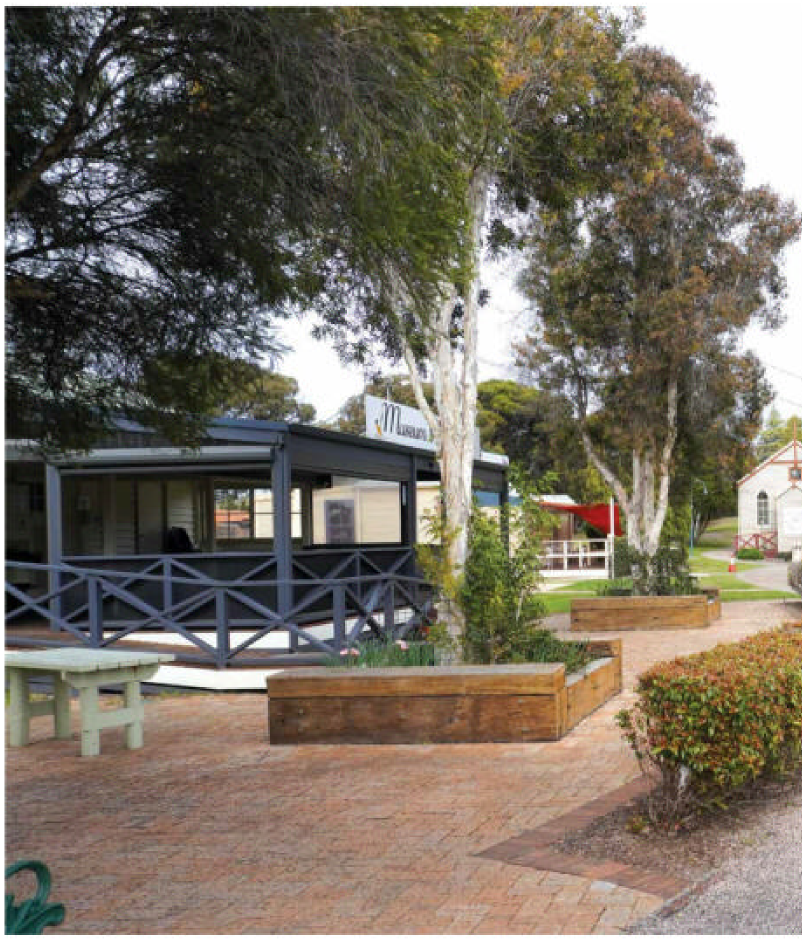
THE GREATEST DRIVE

It was time to get to see what Esperance is known for – its natural assets.

As we journeyed along Great Ocean Drive, I was my own echo chamber, with 'wows' free-flowing from my mouth. It's arguably one of the country's most scenic routes, snaking along turquoise beaches, peaceful bays, and rocky terrains in close succession.

There are 23 stops featured along the 40km scenic loop, including 10 beaches, so expect it to be a stop/start affair. There's no such thing as beach fatigue here – it's simply too hard to resist inviting blue hues from one stop to the next and parking up to capture it all on camera.

But supposing you had to make a short list, there are some notable highlights. Blue Haven Beach is worth the leg stretch down its steep wooden staircase to take in the view of Esperance's towering cliff-face. Then there's Twilight Bay, a local favourite with rounded



> ***"There's no such thing as beach fatigue here – it's simply too hard to resist inviting blue hues from one stop to the next and parking up to capture it all on camera "***

LEFT TO RIGHT The gentle curves of Ocean Drive; Museum Park Period Vilage in the centre of town; Sunrise at Stonehenge Summer Solstice on Merivale Road

> *“Rising 262m above sea level, Frenchman Peak is an extensive workout”*

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Rugged landscape juxtaposes against white sand and turquoise water at Cape Le Grand National Park; Pink hues at Lake Hillier

granite boulders dotting its aqua waters reminiscent of a Zooper Dooper icy pole. Its beach also provides that same refreshing, cold hit. Snorkelling and fishing are popular activities here.

As it turns out, a full day of basking in the sun like a beach-hopping local was not meant to be. The strong sea breeze became all too consuming, and I soon swapped my bathers for a snug puffer jacket. Esperance really did take my breath away in more ways than one.

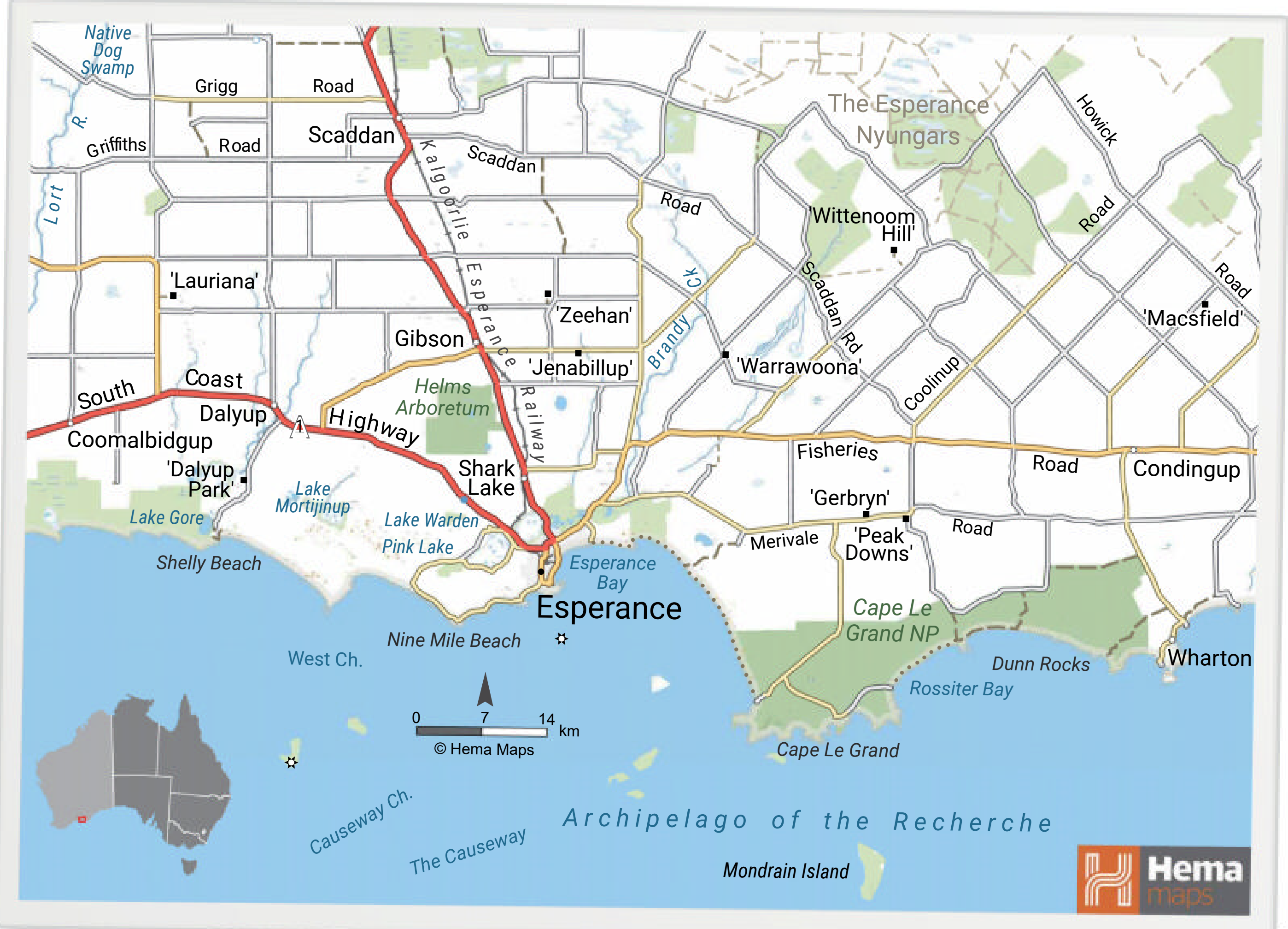
ONE LUCKY ADVENTURE

We hit the road to travel 49km east to Cape Le Grand National Park – one of the most picturesque parks in the State. Its diverse sceneries range from rugged peaks and far-reaching heathlands, all enveloped with pure white sandy beaches and turquoise waters freckled with islands.

And let's not forget all wildlife in between, such as western grey kangaroos, pygmy possums, and a vast collection of colourful wildflowers. It really is a photographer's dream. But of course, it's better to walk the talk.

Rising 262m above sea level, Frenchman Peak is an extensive workout. It's a 3km return trip to the summit and estimated to take two hours to reach the top, although it can be achieved in less time if you're quick with the leg work. There are parts of the climb that are steep and rocky, and it is strongly advised not to go when windy. But if all the stars align, it is well worth the effort and sweat.

Free-flowing 'wows' flurried out of my mouth yet again, taking in the spectacular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Or visit Woody Island, the sole island out of 105 islands and 1200 rocky outcrops in the Recherche Archipelago to boast woodlands.

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W: woodyisland.com.au

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Frenchman Peak; A friendly beached kangaroo at Lucky Bay; Sculpture on Esperance Foreshore; The perfectly aligned Esperance Stonehenge; Sunny skies at Taylor St Quarters; Views from Great Ocean Drive

panoramic views from peak to sea from the summit's peek-a-boo window. This photo-op delight was carved out by oceanic activity over 40-million-years ago. The popular climb forms part of a chain of peaks, including Mount Le Grand (345m) and Mississippi Hill (180m), formed over 600-million-years ago due to movements in the Earth's crust.

Swapping sturdy footwear to thongs, we soon headed to the coast to cool off with an icon or two.

Lucky Bay is legendary for two reasons. The aptly named beach has been officially dubbed 'Australia's whitest beach', and is cloaked by idyllic blue waters. Its claim to fame is backed by science, with the beaches' powdery and squeaky sands examined by National Committee on Soil and Terrain.

With saying that, it's no wonder why kangaroos would want to make the most of Australia's most picturesque beach. 'Roos are commonly spotted frolicking along the bay's shimmering sands. It's a novel sight and like seeing a brochure picture of Esperance come to life – no photoshop required.

Beachgoers like ourselves couldn't get enough. The kangaroos appeared indifferent to bystanders snapping away, even hopping closer to get in on the action. Forget Rottnest Island's quokka selfies when you can have Esperance's beached kangaroos. Better yet, make the encounters more regular by staying at the oceanfront Lucky Bay campground for $15 per person per night.

Away from the countless photoshoots, Thistle Cove and Hellfire Bay are also must-sees and both with fine white sands. The latter is excellent for snorkelling, fishing, diving, surfing and bushwalking activities if wanting to make the most of a multi-day itinerary.

Completing the Le Grand Coastal Trail (15km one way), which connects Le Grand Beach and Rossiter Bay, is also a good way to stretch the legs and appreciate the dreamy coastline.

A TOAST TO THE TOWN

Esperance doesn't have too many options for eating out, but the ones it does have leave a good aftertaste.

Lucky Bay Brewing is Esperance's local craft beer mecca. The casual micro-brewery is a good day out to mingle with locals in its beer garden (or shed) while making your way through a tasting paddle. That paddle led me to make an executive decision at the bar, ordering an ice-cold pint of Skippy Rock Kölsch to linger on while enjoying the brewery's bustling weekend vibes.

For a taste of fancy, we chose to spend our pennies at Taylor St Quarters. The historic oceanside restaurant resides in an old, refurbished hospital originally from Perth and is one of Esperance's most scenic views from a dining table. Expect it to be a bit of an indulgent affair, with modern Australian cuisine shared plates on offer. Give me a plate of succulent pan-seared prawns with nduja salami butter and plump cherry tomatoes any day.

TRADITIONAL OWNERS

The Traditional Owners of the Esperance region are the Ngadju people who have lived in the area for over 50,000 years. We wish to pay respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

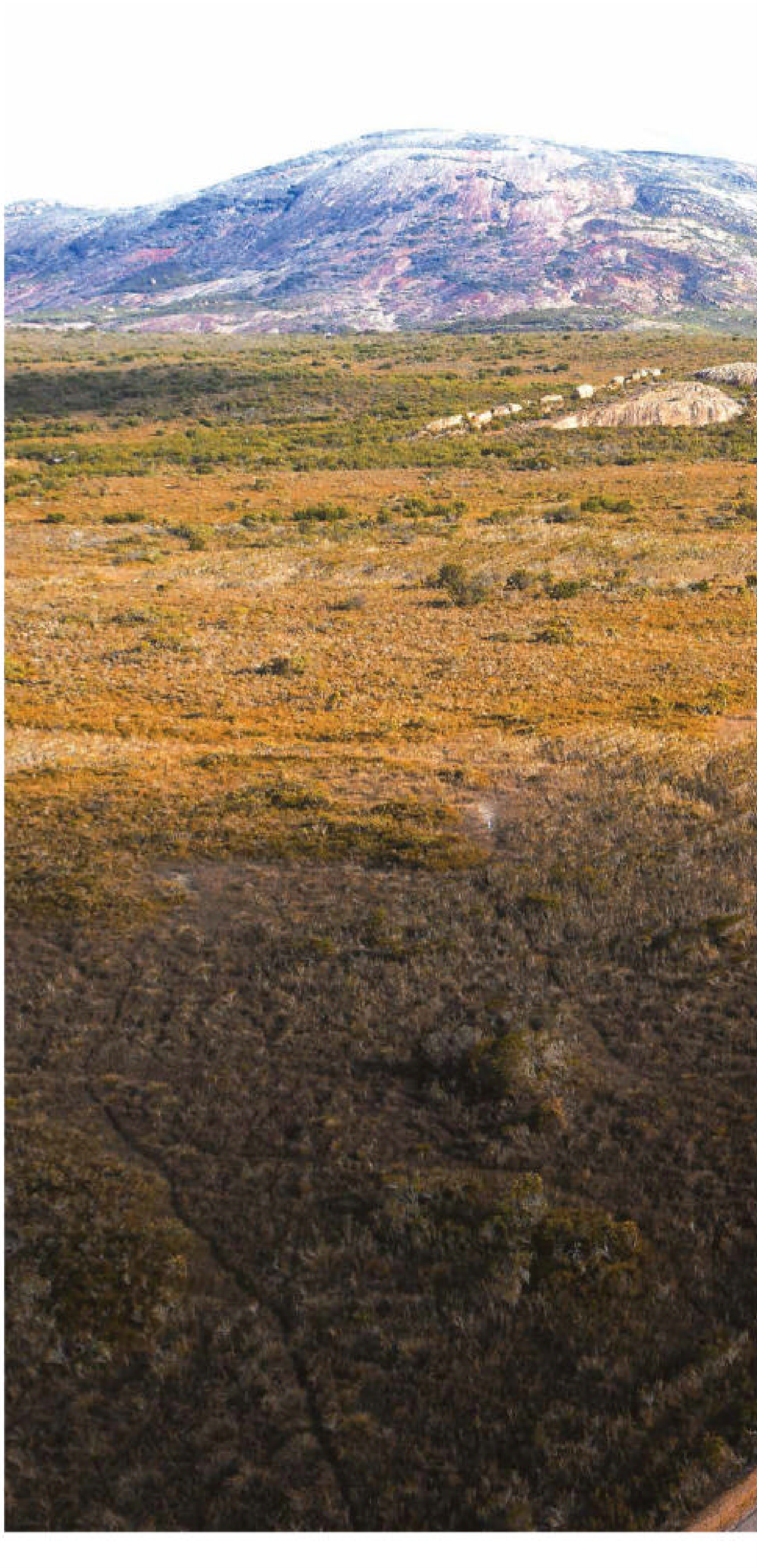
CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Solitude is bliss at Lucky Bay; Perfect day for a pint at Lucky Bay Brewing; Some of the rugged terrain at Cape le Grand National Park; Some of the range at Esperance Distillery Co

IS IT GIN-O'CLOCK?

"It's a bit early to have gin, don't you think?" My dad said to me as we slowly pulled into Esperance Distillery Co. He did have a point. It was 11am on a Monday morning – but we were on holiday, and soon it would be a reasonable drinking hour, right?

"I had to satisfy my gin-curiosity," I cheekily replied.

These days, gin distilleries seem to be springing up like mushrooms across the State. Esperance's latest institution, Esperance Distillery Co, is one of the newest and smallest in the country – and perhaps one of the most unique. Operated by father and son team, James and David, the distillery is renowned for using regional botanicals to infuse its gins, capturing the essence of the



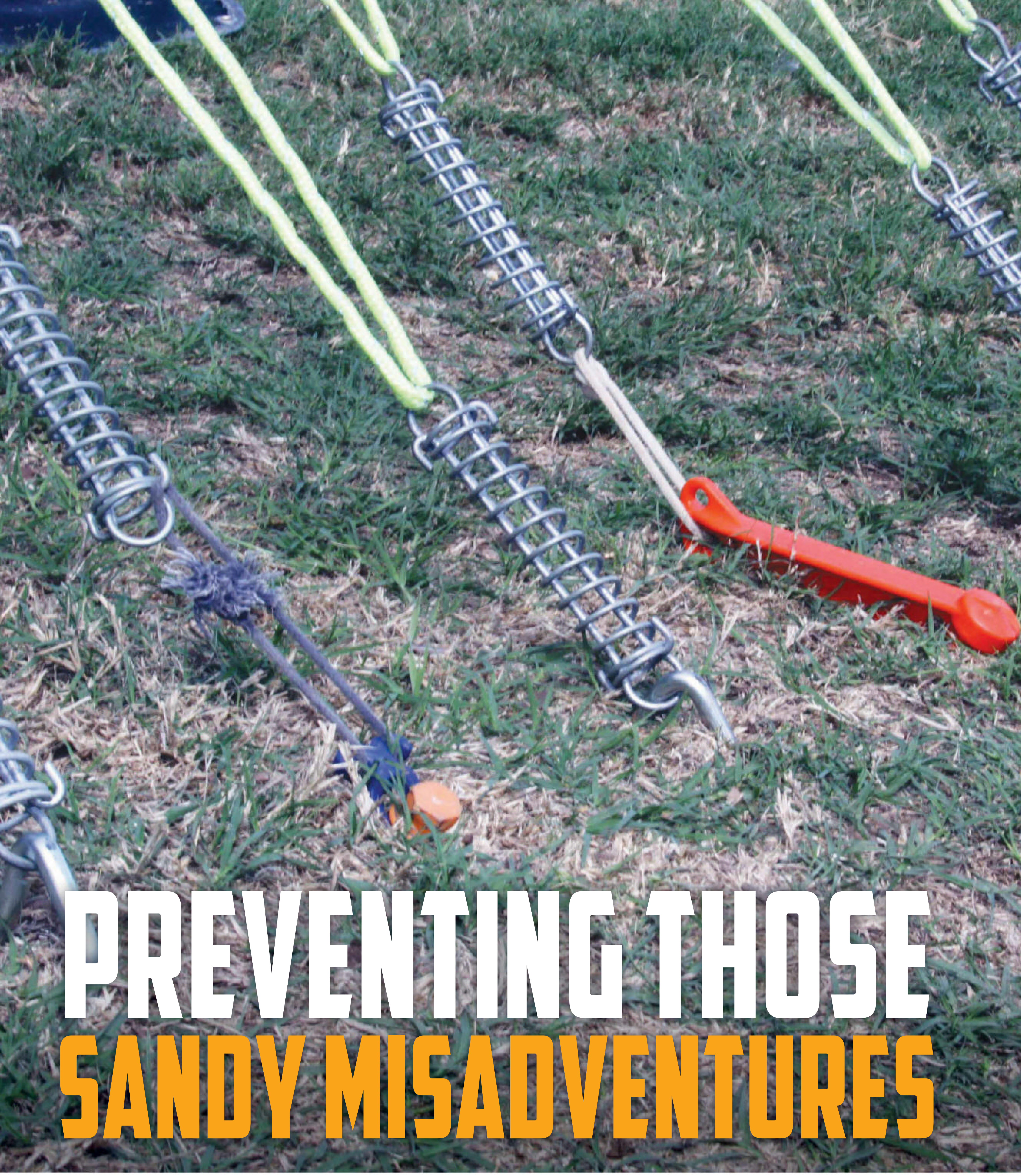
Esperance scenery in a bottle. How's that for a change of scent in the air?

Their signature variety, Middle Island Pink gin, is considered one of the world's rarest gins, instilled with Esperance Wax botanical, giving the liquid dessert a pastel pink tinge – think of it as a drinkable version of its famed pink lake, Lake Hillier. After co-owner James walked us through the handful of handcrafted gins available, it was time to have our early happy hour.

Swapping coffee beans for botanicals, we sipped our way through a handful of gin varieties, including its unintentionally gimmicky pink drop. With each sip, I felt the warmth and fuzziness overtake me.

Perhaps this would be Esperance's next celebrated icon, and I am all for it.

Lucky Bay Brewing
Our Beers!
Tasters
Middies
Pints
Merchandise
Snacks
Wine
Soft drink
ROCK SOLID
RIP CURL
SURFING



PREVENTING THOSE SANDY MISADVENTURES

Camping beginners may not be accustomed to the various types of sand pegs out there, especially considering there are ones suited for specific conditions.

Words Courtney Cunningham **Pics** Supplied

Waking up on the beach after a night of beach camping offers you some of the most extraordinary sunrises in Australia. Setting up camp on the beach means setting up camp on sand and this type of camping requires certain accessories to make the whole thing successful – sand pegs.

These handy little pegs ensure your tent doesn't go rolling down the beach, or your awning isn't flapping in the wind like a kite. They give you that extra grip you need on the sand and come in a range of styles and lengths to suit the environment and your needs. Other than length, one of the main considerations with sand pegs is that you have the right ones for the environment you're camping in, the right ones for what you're holding down, how much tension they will be holding as well as for what you're removing them from the ground with.

Here's our run down of just some of the different types of sand pegs you can find on the market, to get you started on your next getaway.

TENT PEGS

These standard hammer-in tent pegs have a large head design to be easily hammered into the ground. While a little bulky, they are light and great for soft ground. They have both a hook and loop on the end and being rounded on the top and plastic, so it won't hurt if tripped over. They come in a range of sizes and are a cost-effective solution for camping on sand.

Advantages:

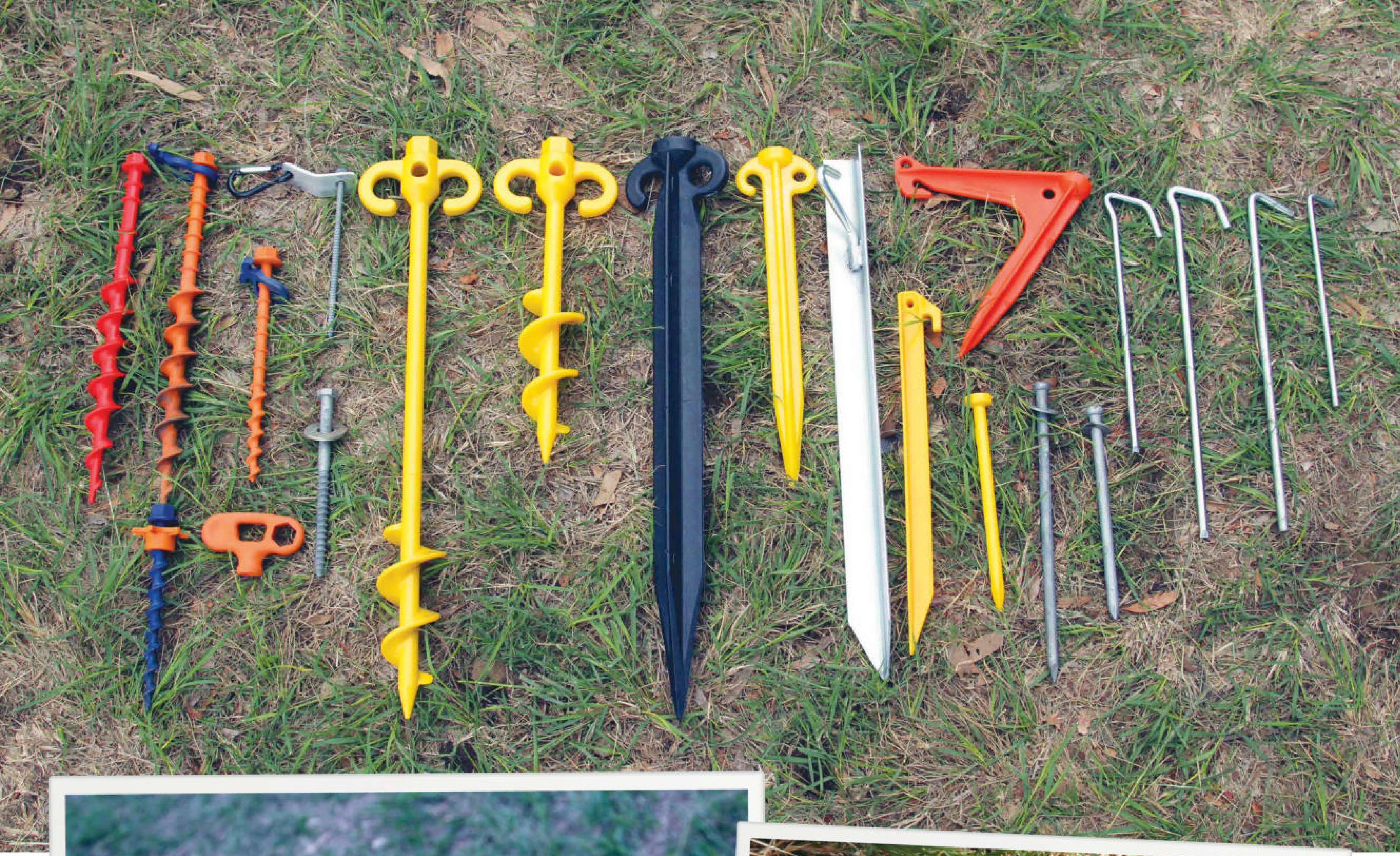
- For sand or soft ground
- Have a larger surface area to hold the pressure from the guy rope
- Incredibly cheap
- Have a range of sizes

Disadvantages:

- Easy to hurt yourself hammering them in
- Are often hard to remove

Australian Supa-Peg sells standard grade polypropylene tent pegs – versatile, durable and lightweight – and high impact polycarbonate tent pegs – strongest and durable – from 225-490mm in length and are UV treated for longevity in the sun. These have a Hi-Impact, large head with a hook and eye and cutting edges so they can easily slide through the sand, making them an ideal peg for beach campers. 225mm pegs start from RRP$2.45.

LEFT TO RIGHT There are a variety of sand pegs available; It is important to care for your pegs after a trip



SCREW PEGS

Some types of sand, soil and snow can cause standard sand pegs to fail, which is where screw pegs come in handy. These tent stakes act like a screw that you can drive into the ground with a cordless drill or using a socket wrench.

Advantages:

- Ideal for campsites, turf and firm soil
- Are easy to use and are great for places that get wet
- Larger ones are great in sand, soft soil, snow and underwater
- Can tie many ropes to a single screw
- Easy to remove with cordless drill

Disadvantages:

- Can break when pulled at an angle
- Need to bring something to screw them in
- Not suitable for use in hard ground
- More on the expensive side

Blue Screw Pegs are an Australian brand that are quite unique in their design and behaviour. Their pegs can also be used as anchors for boats, dog tethers, vertical guy ropes, plus much more. They are great for sand and soft soil use. Come in either a pack of four for small screws or a pack of two for large screws, both at RRP$15.95.

ANGLE STEEL PEGS

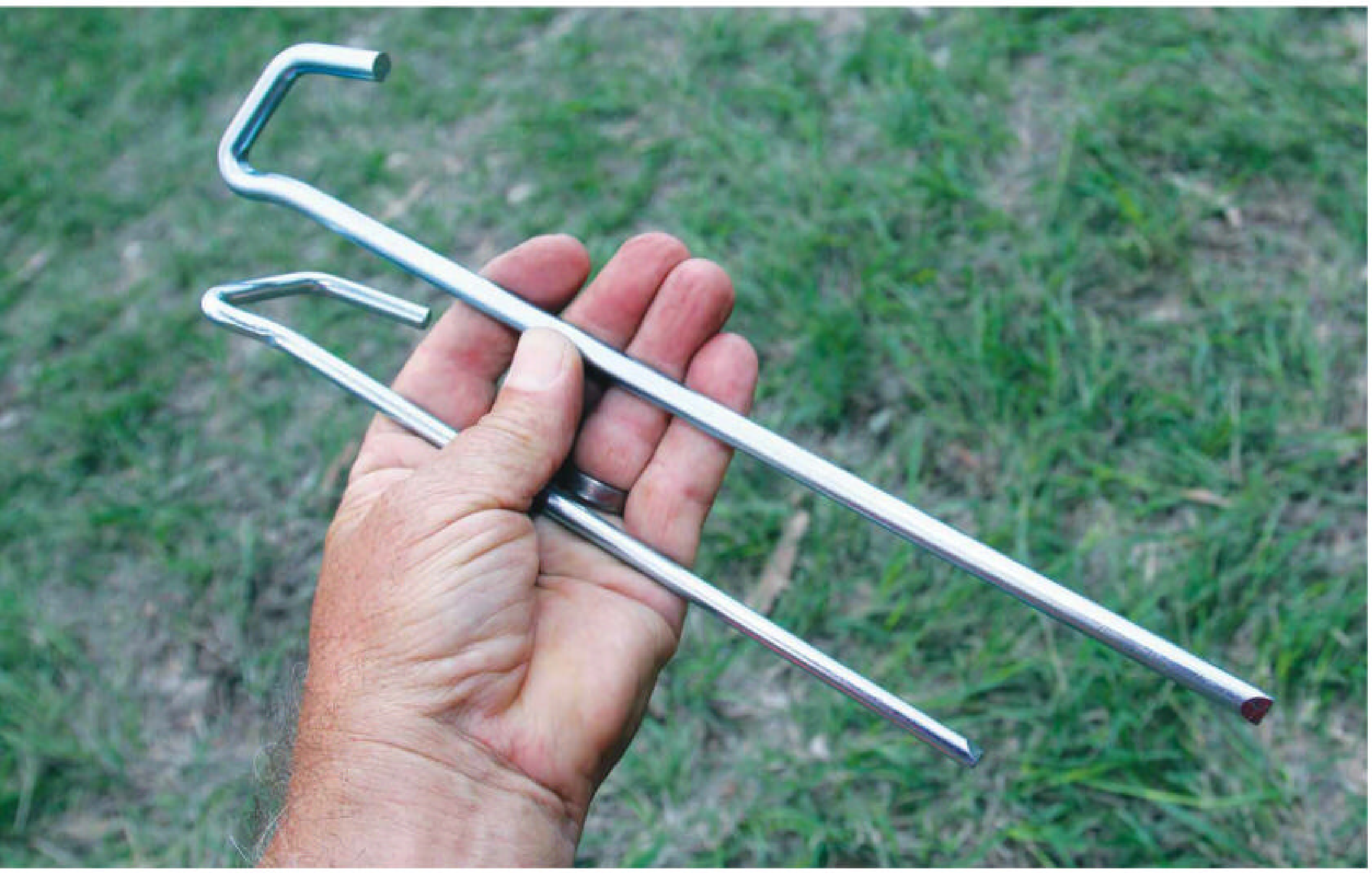
These pegs are designed to anchor awnings and tents in extreme conditions, with the hook securing either a trace spring or a rope. Once they're in the ground, they're less likely to twist.

Advantages:

- Are strong and suitable for the hardest ground or sand
- Can hold bigger loads, such as large tarps and shelters in strong winds

Disadvantages:

- Specialised pegs that may not suit all terrains
- If the ground is very rocky or hard, sometimes it's almost impossible to get them in
- One of the most expensive types of pegs



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Key head pegs are inexpensive and handy; Angle steel pegs work in a unique way; Screw pegs can also be used as a dog tether; Know which pegs work where; There are different ways to screw pegs into the ground

> "Tailor which pegs you bring to each trip away so you can swap ***out the pegs to suit the conditions***"

- They also have sharp tops, so care must be taken when walking around

Sea to Summit's Ground Control Pegs are perfect for your tent, tarp or shelter. They're made from anodised 6061-T6 allow, so are incredibly strong for their weight. Added to this strength are the three sides which are great for holding into the ground. For harder ground where you can't get the stake fully in, there are multiple guy points to minimise leverage on the peg. They also come with a reflective cord and a luminescent pull tap so you can extract the peg when leaving and see them when walking around at night. Priced from RRP$4.99.

KEY HEAD PEGS

These are essentially the original peg, and are a straight length of metal with a bent section at the top that provides a hook to keep guy lines in place. They are the most affordable pegs on the market.

Advantages:

- Keeps the tent guy line from coming off and provides an easy-pull mechanism to remove the peg from the ground
- Work well in hard, rocky soil
- They are cheap
- Can hammer back into shape

Disadvantages:

- The cheaper quality ones bend easily
- Don't hold well in softer ground

Poles Apart Accessories is an Australian manufacturer based in Country Victoria that sells a variety of different pegs to help with camping. Their Galvanised Steel Tent Pegs provide extra stability when holding down a larger tent or a tarp and are durable and made to withstand various weather conditions. They are lightweight, come in a number of sizes and are a cheap way to replace your older, bent and worn out pegs. Prices start at RRP$0.80 each.

SAND AND SNOW PEGS

A benefit of these pegs for travellers is that they stack neatly together, so are good when you have limited storage space. The curved stake has a number of holes that help to increase holding power, particular in snow. The folded top allows for easy striking into the ground.

Advantages:

- Great for sand and snow
- Perfect for limited storage space
- Lightweight yet sturdy aluminium

Disadvantages:

- More on the expensive side
- Can sometimes be hard to get into various terrains

Oztrail is an Australian owned and operated supplier of quality and affordable camping and outdoor products, with their six pack of Snow and Sand Pegs (RRP$41) great for those pitching a tent or awning in difficult conditions. Their wide profile helps to distribute force in sand and snow, giving them great ease to pierce the ground as well as greater holding power.

GROUND ANCHOR PEGS

These angled pegs are great for when camping with young children or older members of the family as they lay flat to the ground, rather than poke up, and they're great for times you need extra hold on your tent or awning.

Advantages:

- Lightweight
- High visibility
- Pushes flat into the ground
- Easy to remove
- Made for solid dirt and soil
- Great for extreme weather

Disadvantages:

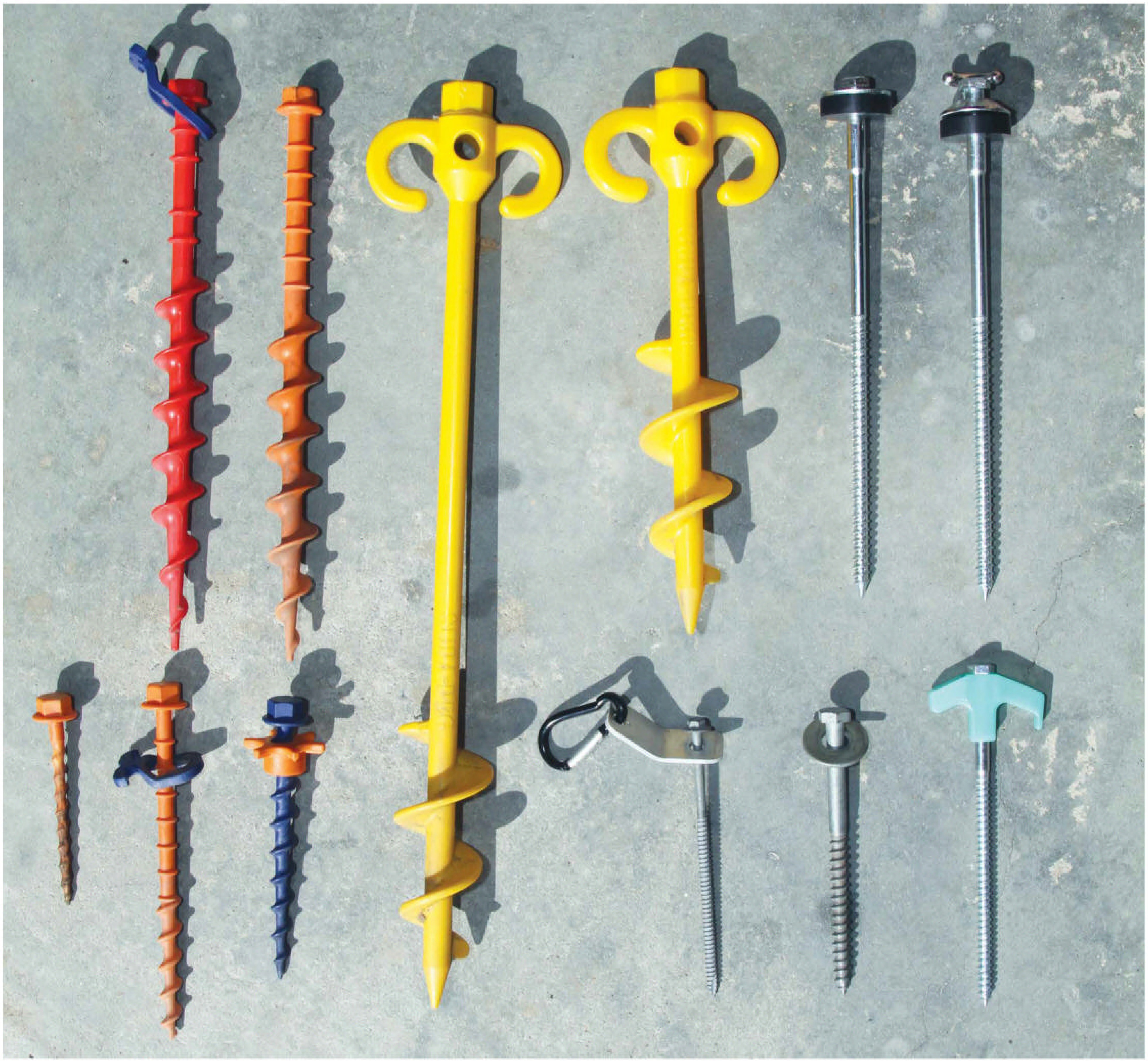
- Not suitable for soft sand

Supa Peg's Ground Anchor Tent Pegs are a standard grade tent peg filled with glass, where, as the rope pulls on the peg, the peg actually digs deeper into the ground. Their angled design means that they can be hammered flat into the ground, so you don't trip over them, and being bright orange makes them more visible. You can grab one for RRP$2.95.

MORE AUSTRALIAN PEG MANUFACTURERS

Hex Pegs: hexpegs.com.au
GroundGrabba: groundgrabber.com.au
Patriot Supply CO: patriotsupple.com.au
Peggy Peg: peggypeg.com.au
Red Roads: redroads.com.au

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Each peg has its advantages; Ground anchor pegs are great for extreme weather; With the right peg you'll be sweet; There are multiple options of the same peg



SELECTING YOUR PEG

When choosing the right peg for your campground, as mentioned, the ground you will be camping on needs to be considered. The softer the ground, the bigger the surface area the pegs needs to maintain. Regardless of which peg you choose, make sure to hammer them into the ground on a 45-degree angle to the ground, as this gives them greater holding strength.

Tailor which pegs you bring to each trip away so you can swap out your pegs to suit the conditions. The best tent pegs for sand are ones that are typically longer so that they can reach into firmer ground, many having ridges and notches to hold them in place. Bear in mind that in one location, you might need one type of peg while in another, you'll need a different type due to the density of the sand. As a tip, when camping in sandy areas, scoop off the dry, loose sand to expose the densely packed sand underneath and start your pegging from there.

In terms of how many to bring, carry enough that you can tie down everything that will fly in the wind, whether it be your tent, awning or loose gear, including enough for those additional guy lines on your tent for when it's windy. It's always recommended you bring additional pegs than the ones that come with your gear, as the ones provided are often very basic and will only work in average conditions.

Some pegs are easy to remove, like screw-in pegs, but others can be notoriously difficult. Consider getting your hands on a peg puller where you can stand holding the T-handle with the peg puller hooked into the peg so that you pull using your legs, not your back. A bit more of an expensive option are the pullers that work on leverage where you tuck the side bar under the head of the peg and place the pivot point on the ground. Stand on the outer end of the lever and the peg comes right out.

While the prices vary, it's a good idea to equip yourself with some of each peg so that you're prepared for all the various adventurous trips you're planning to take in the future.

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- 3 x 85L FRESH & 1 x 95L GREY WATER TANKS ★★★★★
- TOOLBOX WITH WEBER & GENERATOR SLIDES ★★★★★
- ALUMINIUM FRAMES, COMPOSITE CLADDING ★★★★★
- HOT DIPPED GAL AUSTRALIAN CHASSIS ★★★★★

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★★★★★ ONE PIECE INSULATED COMPOSITE ROOF
★★★★★ CRUISEMASTER INDEPENDENT SUSPENSIONS
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★★★★★ 2 x 100L WATER & 100L GREY WATER TANKS
★★★★★ TOOLBOX WITH WEBER & GENERATOR SLIDES
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★★★★★ 100% NSW LEATHER COMPANY DINETTE

*Composite Cladding & Composiite Roof Are Hail Resistant But Not Hail Proof. May be damaged by very large hail.

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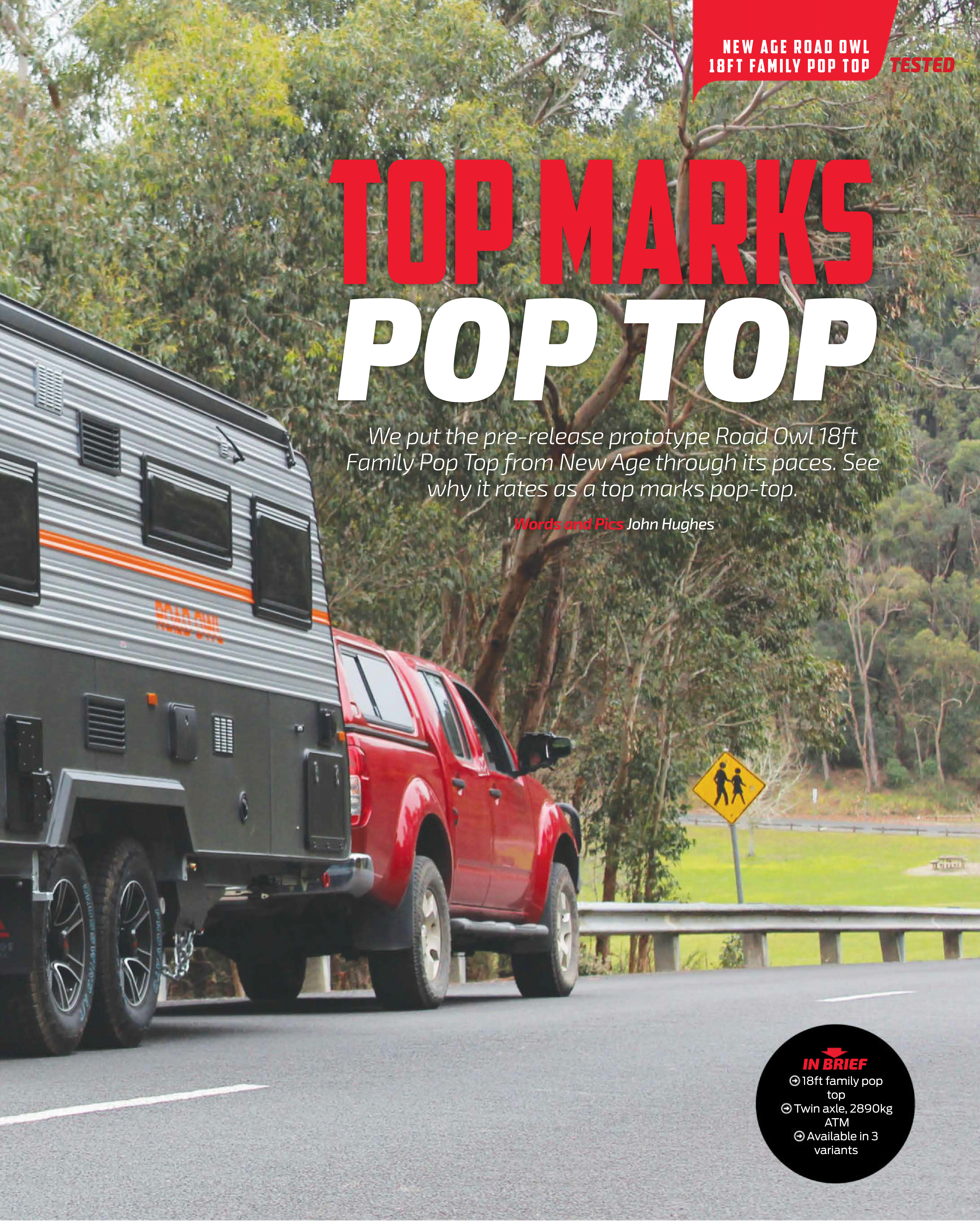


TOP MARKS POP TOP

We put the pre-release prototype Road Owl 18ft Family Pop Top from New Age through its paces. See why it rates as a top marks pop-top.

Words and Pics John Hughes

IN BRIEF

- 18ft family pop top
- Twin axle, 2890kg ATM
- Available in 3 variants

This pre-release 2022 prototype features a number of cosmetic changes along with some useful functional upgrades which we will explore. The Road Owl starts as an entry level, family van that can be stepped up with two bundled option packages. I had a chat with Darren Swenson, General Manager Sales and Marketing who explained New Age has seen an increase in demand for all categories of caravans but particularly family vans. Families that may have otherwise gone to Bali or alike are now buying caravans. The Road Owl is designed to open up the caravan lifestyle to more people.

While the review is on the highest spec Adventurer Pack variant, it is worth quickly running through the 'hierarchy' of the other two packages and some of the key differences to the van tested.

The base model (listed $50,190) has lower spec running gear – a regular chassis and leaf spring suspension instead of a more beefed up chassis with independent suspension and 15in tyres and wheels instead of 16in rollers – other economies include one 110L water tank instead of two, and one 9kg gas bottle instead of two. You also do without an air-conditioner, solar panel, external speakers, TV and picnic table. The Comfort Pack (listed at $54,990) also features the same base level running gear but gains all the other omissions listed above.

The omissions from the base model are fair enough, as they allow customers to mix and match what they like from the options list, but it is worth keeping in mind that you also pay for upgrades in weight. While weights on the 2022 Base and Comfort variants were not available at the time of writing this article, published weights for the 2021 models would suggest the tare difference between base and top model could be in the order of 200kg or more.

ROAD OWL
ROAD OWL

MEASURING UP

PROS

- Well-designed pop-top with good layout
- Fan of the Cruisemaster CRS2 suspension
- I like the external water pump location

CONS

- Access main under bed storage is not easy
- Need to squat to reach microwave

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE The pop top has a comfortable clearance; It comes in three variants; There is ample storage up front; The chassis features 150mm main members and a 50mm raiser.

RUNNING GEAR

Eighteen-foot is the crossover size where some vans feature a single axle setup and others are double axled. The upside to double axle is that you are afforded a greater payload and corresponding ATM, and delivering 600kg with an ATM of 2890kg, it is within reach of most current market dual cab utes which have become the family car of choice in Australia.

The substantial chassis is adorned with the Walkinshaw badge leveraging the credibility that comes with the automotive engineering parent company. The chassis features 150mm main members and a 50mm raiser, and the A-frame is rolled creating a single continuous frame with the chassis main members. New Age claims this design provides greater durability and reliability. The welds on this chassis are created robotically, which provides a very consistent result. The Walkinshaw chassis first featured on New Age Vans in 2018 so it has had the time in the field to prove itself.

WALKINSHAW
D OWL

> "In a relatively short space of time, they have ascended to be one of ***the major players in the industry with this building style***"

MASTER
MASTER
30
30
CRUISEMASTER
CRS

CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT The Adventurer pack features country road suspension; It's built using aluminium; A 190cm person can comfortably stand in the Road Owl

One of the big upgrades in the Adventurer pack is the Cruisemaster CRS2 system. CRS stands for country road suspension, and it is described as having semi-offroad capability. The system features an independent arm, coiled spring and dual shocks. Having been involved in an outback torture test of the original CRS system and the big brother XT system, I have a lot of faith in the Cruisemaster product.

Another top-notch brand featured in the van is the towing safety products of BMPRO. The sway control and breakaway devices are the kind of systems you hope you never use but are glad to have on board.

TRADITIONAL CONSTRUCTION METHOD

The body construction method is very traditional with aluminium profiled cladding, a meranti frame and styrofoam insulation panels. While this is not cutting edge technology it has served New Age very well. In a relatively short space of time, they ascended to be one of the major players in the industry with this building style. The key to success with this construction method is having the highest standards in sealing the van and routine maintenance to prevent water ingress over time.

Something a little less traditional is the rear styling, adopted for the first time in the 2022 Road Owl Pop Top. The spare wheel is nestled into a moulding on the rear of the van, creating a less obtrusive look and incrementally improved weight distribution. The roof construction looks very solid with a fibreglass skin, composite core and aluminium surrounds for stiffness. I have seen lighter construction pop-top roofs buckle and I don't imagine this design will suffer that fate.

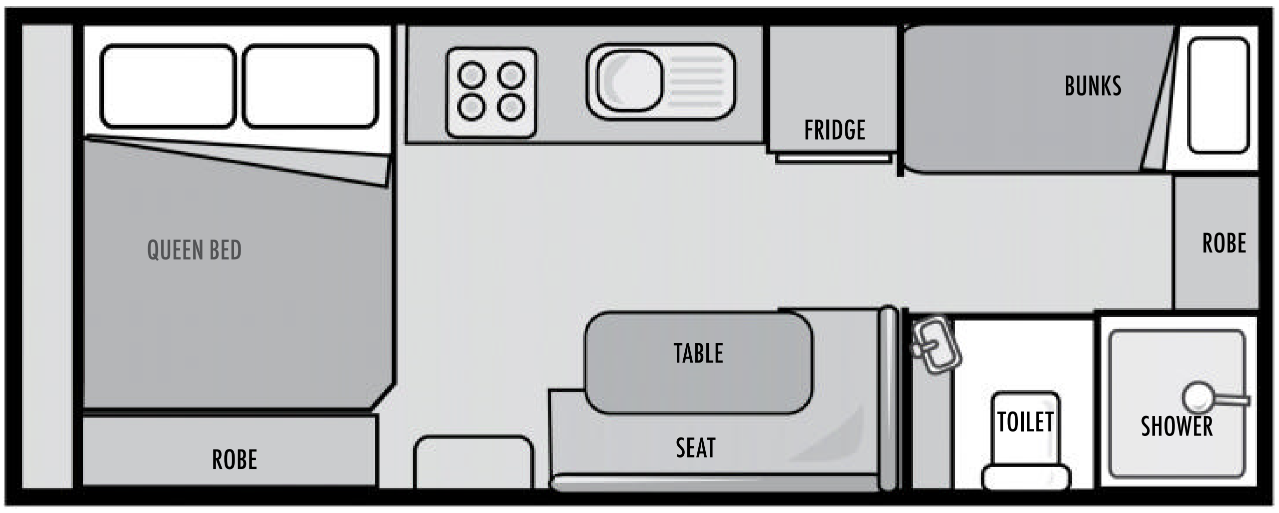
POP TOP SPECIFICS

There are a distinct set of challenges that come with designing a pop top well because all of the furniture needs to fit into 'roof down' space. This can create headroom problems with furniture even when the roof is up.

I fetched a 190cm test pilot to sit in the lounge and conducted a headroom check with the overhead lockers. He had enough room to sit naturally – just. If you are taller than 190cm, no problem, just sit at the head of the table away from the overhead locker.

Allowing for the roof down space also means you simply can't have tall overhead lockers. The Road Owl compensated for this with an abundance of lockers. Storage space is good all over. I just have one grizzle, but I will come back to that.

The whole idea of a pop-top is to keep the 'closed' height low for the benefits of aerodynamics and squeezing under carports and roller doors. Thanks to 16in wheels and a taller chassis/suspension system, at 2.65m closed, the Road Owl Adventurer is not the lowest pop-top going around.



NEW AGE
ROAD OWL 18 FT FAMILY POP TOP

WEIGHTS AND MEASURES
Overall length 7.85m (25ft 9in)
Body length internal 5.77m (18ft 11in)
Travel Width 2.5m (8ft 2in)
Height (closed) 2.65m (8ft 8in)
Internal Height 2.03m (6ft 8in)
Tare 2290kg
ATM 2890kg
Payload 600kg (calculated)
Ball weight at tare 160kg

EXTERNAL
Frame Meranti timber
Cladding Silver hi-profile stucco cladding c/w rear mould kit and recessed spare wheel
Chassis Walkinshaw hot dipped galvanised
Suspension Cruisemaster CRS2
Coupling Recessed 50mm tow ball
Brakes AL-KO 12in electric drum
Wheels 245/75 R16 tyres and wheels (manufactured by Goodyear)
Water 2 x 110L water tanks
Battery 1 x 100Ah AGM
Solar 1 x 150W solar panel c/w controller
Air-conditioner Floor mounted reverse cycle
Gas 2 x 9kg gas bottles
Sway control BMPRO Sway Control / BMPRO Trail Safe

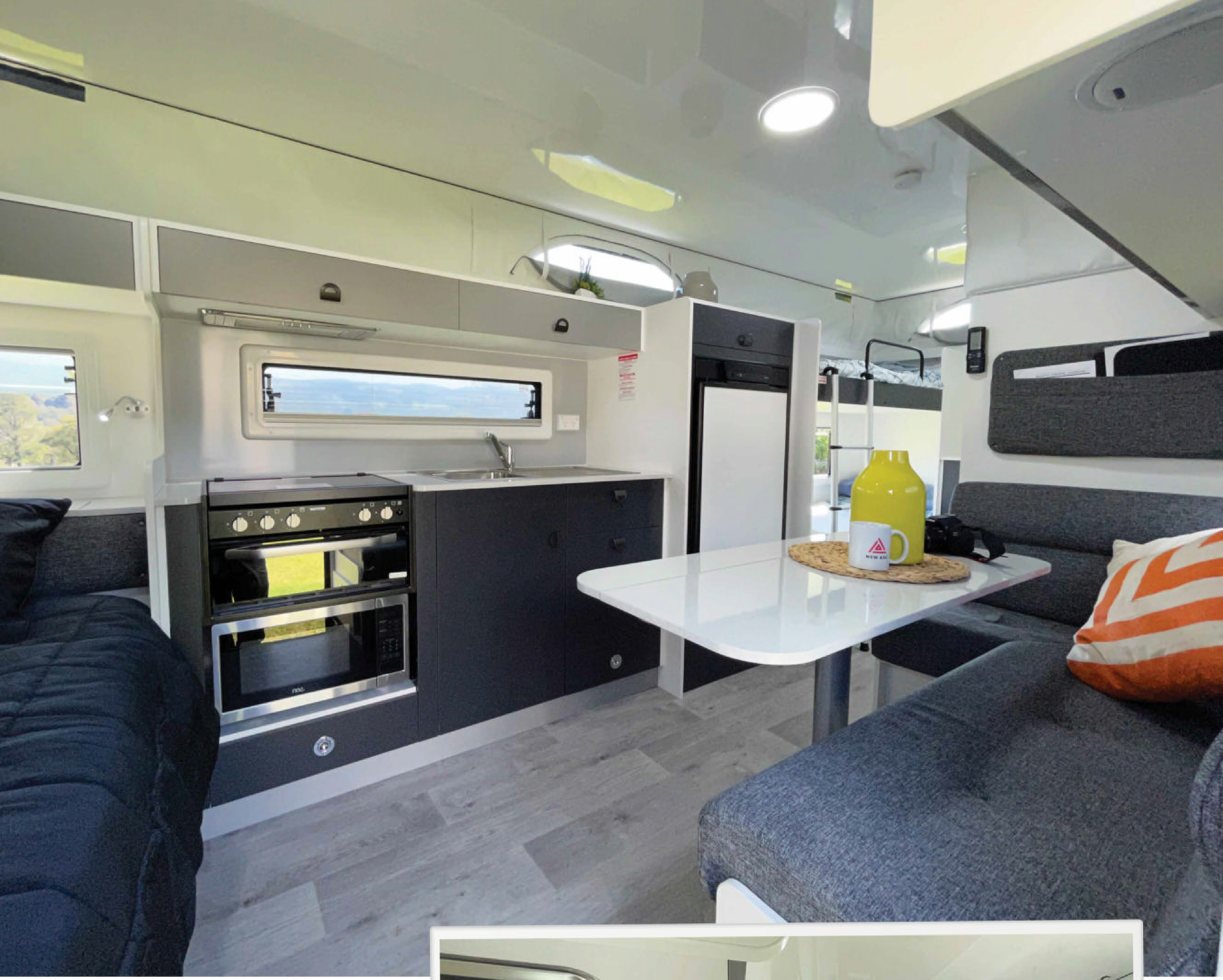
INTERNAL
Cooking Thetford 4 burner, mini grill cooktop
Microwave NCE 23L FB
Fridge Thetford 164L 3-way
Bathroom Ensuite with separate shower & Thetford toilet
Hot water HWS gas/electric 25L capacity
Note: The caravan industry like many others is still facing supply challenges. New Age need to exercise flexibility in suppliers used to meet customer's orders.

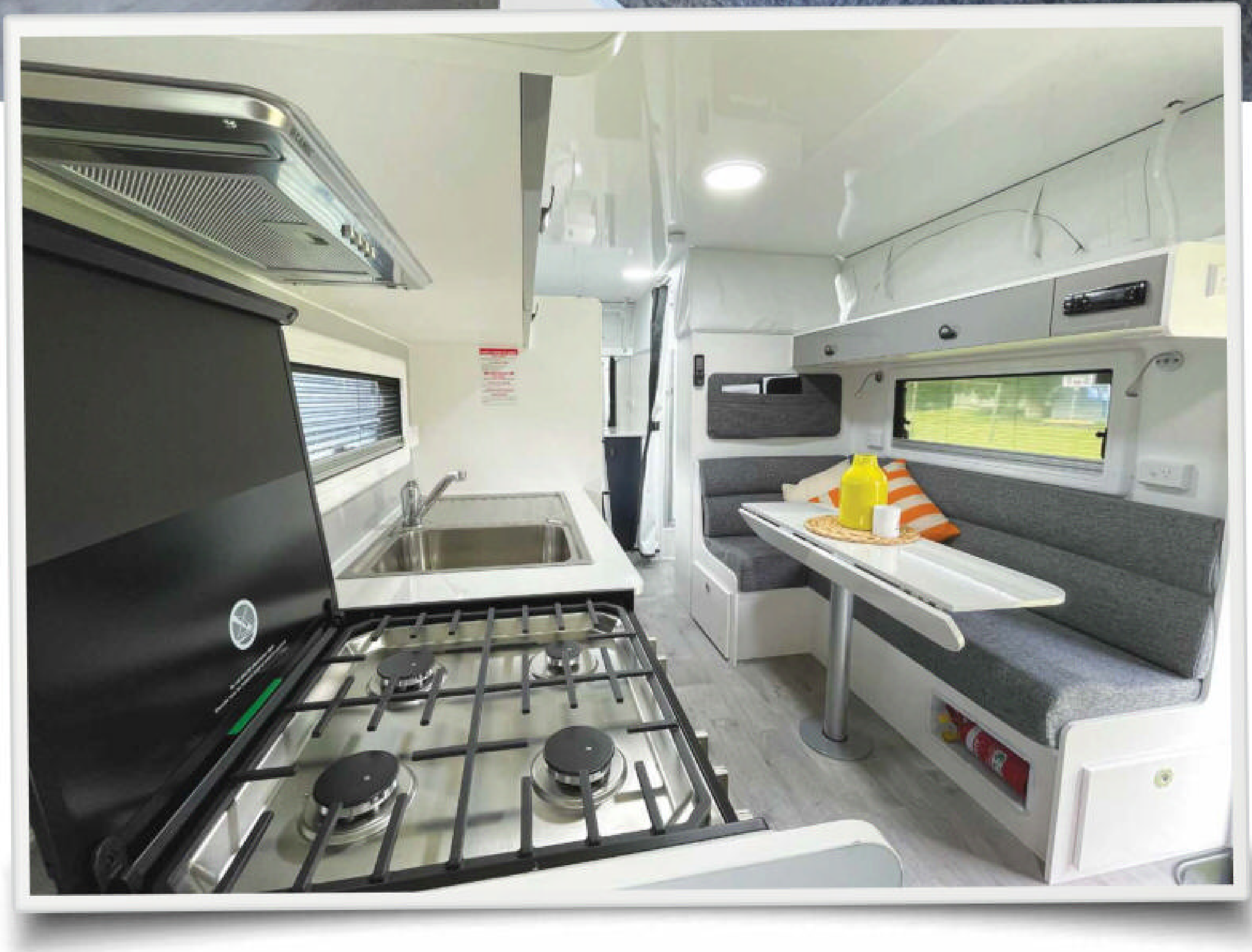
PRICE FROM
Standard $50,190 (inc. GST)
Comfort Pack $54,990 (inc. GST)
Adventurer Pack $64,490 (inc. GST)

OPTIONS FITTED (STANDARD ON ADVENTURER MODEL)
- Reverse camera
- External shower
- 2in raiser
- 6in main member
- Tray in A-Frame
- Single pull-out step

PRICE AS SHOWN $64,490 (inc. GST)

MORE INFO
29 Shirley Way, Epping VIC 3076
Ph: (03) 9305 1714
W: newagecaravans.com.au





The Adventurer is clearly a lot lower than hard top caravans – you just need to do your homework to make sure that it will fit where you want to store it. If the Adventurer proves too tall for you, check out the Base and Comfort as I expect they will be a bit lower – I can't help you with heights as New Age don't have those specs available yet.

When we review prototypes, sometimes we come across things that need ironing out. Simply put, the roof was difficult to lift. New Age agreed with my observation and advised that they are reviewing the gas struts with the supplier. I am happy to accept this at face value. I think the takeaway for readers is no matter what brand of pop-top you are looking at, it is prudent to do a test lift yourself to make sure you are happy with the operation.

Considering all the variables that go into designing a good pop top, this van gets close to top marks.

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE A hinged table can create a wider passageway; The lounge features more lumbar support than ever before; Bunks are tucked neatly away at the back

INSIDE

First impressions. Take one step inside, glance left, see an east-west bed, look right and see that there is a lot of room in an 18-footer. This is achieved with a few good ideas. The east-west bed takes up minimal length in the floor plan (I think east-west beds are a reasonable approach for family vans, but they are generally less palatable for couples vans unless they are particularly compact). A hinged table partially folds to make the 'passage' wider when the table is not in use. In addition to the real space created, a greater sense of openness is achieved with a large mirror at the rear of the van and a bright look that has been the hallmark of New Age interior design.

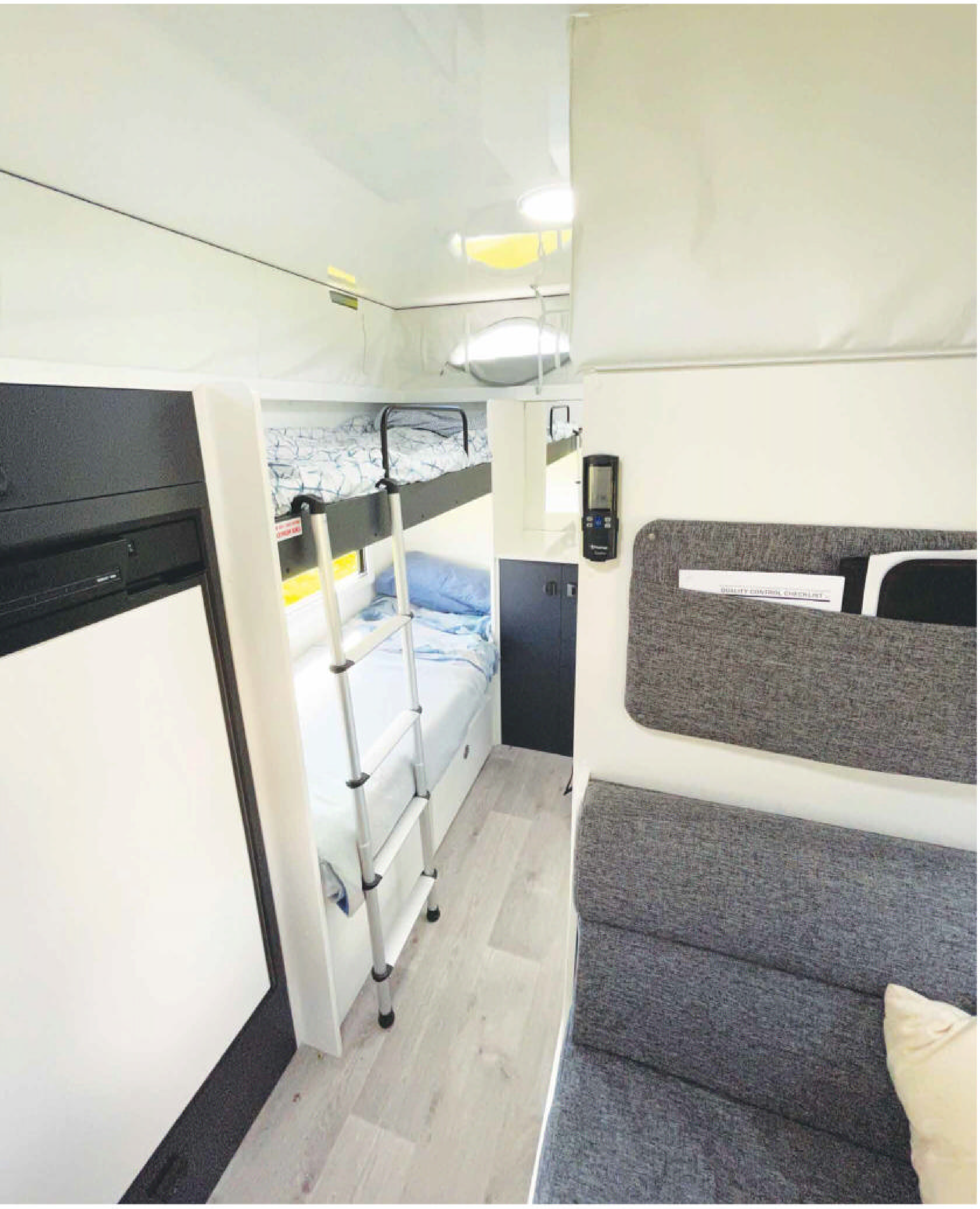
Talking of bright, the LEDs give you all the light you will ever need including plenty of reading lamps (new for 2022). You might be fooled that there are no USB points, but they are neatly hidden in the underside of the reading lights. You won't have any trouble finding the powerpoints as they are everywhere.

New Age advise the dining area has more cushion depth and lumbar support than ever before. What I can tell you is the fabric upholstered L-shaped lounge is comfy and will accommodate two adults and two kids.

Cooking is taken care of with a Thetford 4-burner, mini grill cooktop but you will have to squat to operate the NCE 23L microwave. I am forgiving of the microwave position and see it as just part of the wonderful world of caravan compromise. The fridge is a capable Thetford 164L 3-way unit.

Back to my little grizzle, the space under the main bed affords great storage but it is not easy to access due to the weight of the mattress and a lack of gas struts. After a few attempts, I developed a knack for doing it unassisted. However, it is probably best done as a two-person job and occasional access items should be stored there.

When you do access under the bed, you will find the Truma air-conditioner unit. This is often the preferred location in pop tops to keep weight and height out of the roof.



RATINGS

VALUE FOR MONEY
★★★★★★★★⯪☆
"Value is in the eye of the beholder. Take your pick of a base version at $52k, all the way through to a highly spec'd version at $67k."

TOWABILITY
★★★★★★★★☆☆
"The Road Owl followed along comfortably behind the early model Navara."

SUITABILITY FOR INTENDED TOURING
★★★★★★★★☆☆
"The full spec variant reviewed reaches into the semi-offroad space while the base model is much more suited to caravan park stays."

BUILD QUALITY
★★★★★★★★⯪☆
"Attention to detail is good."

LIVEABILITY
★★★★★★★★☆☆
"Good design principles make this a great van to enjoy time inside and out."

SELF-SUFFICIENCY
★★★★★★★☆☆☆
"Reasonable off grid capability. Needs a greywater tank to go the next level."

CUSTOMER CARE
★★★★★★★★★☆
"3-year warranty on complete van including supplier appliances and components. Strong after sales network."

INNOVATION
★★★★★★★⯪☆☆
"Solid, proven concepts with the chassis standing out in the innovation department."

X-FACTOR
★★★★★★★☆☆☆
"Rear styling is the highlight in an otherwise traditional van."

A separate shower and toilet is a nice achievement for this van size and had all the usual appointments. The concertina nature of pop tops means that privacy is achieved with a curtain. The upside is curtains generally stand up to corrugated roads better than full sized doors.

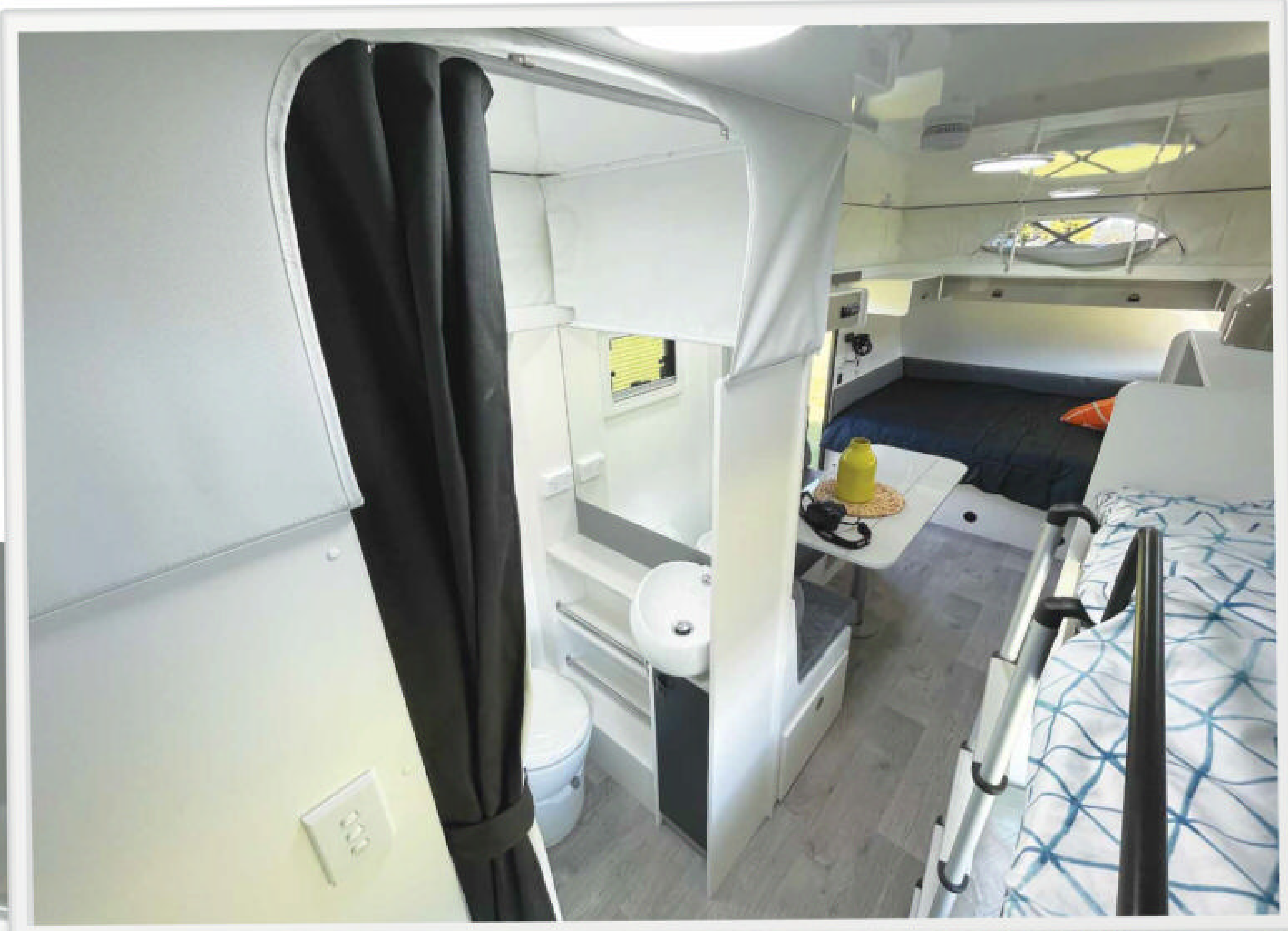
OUTSIDE

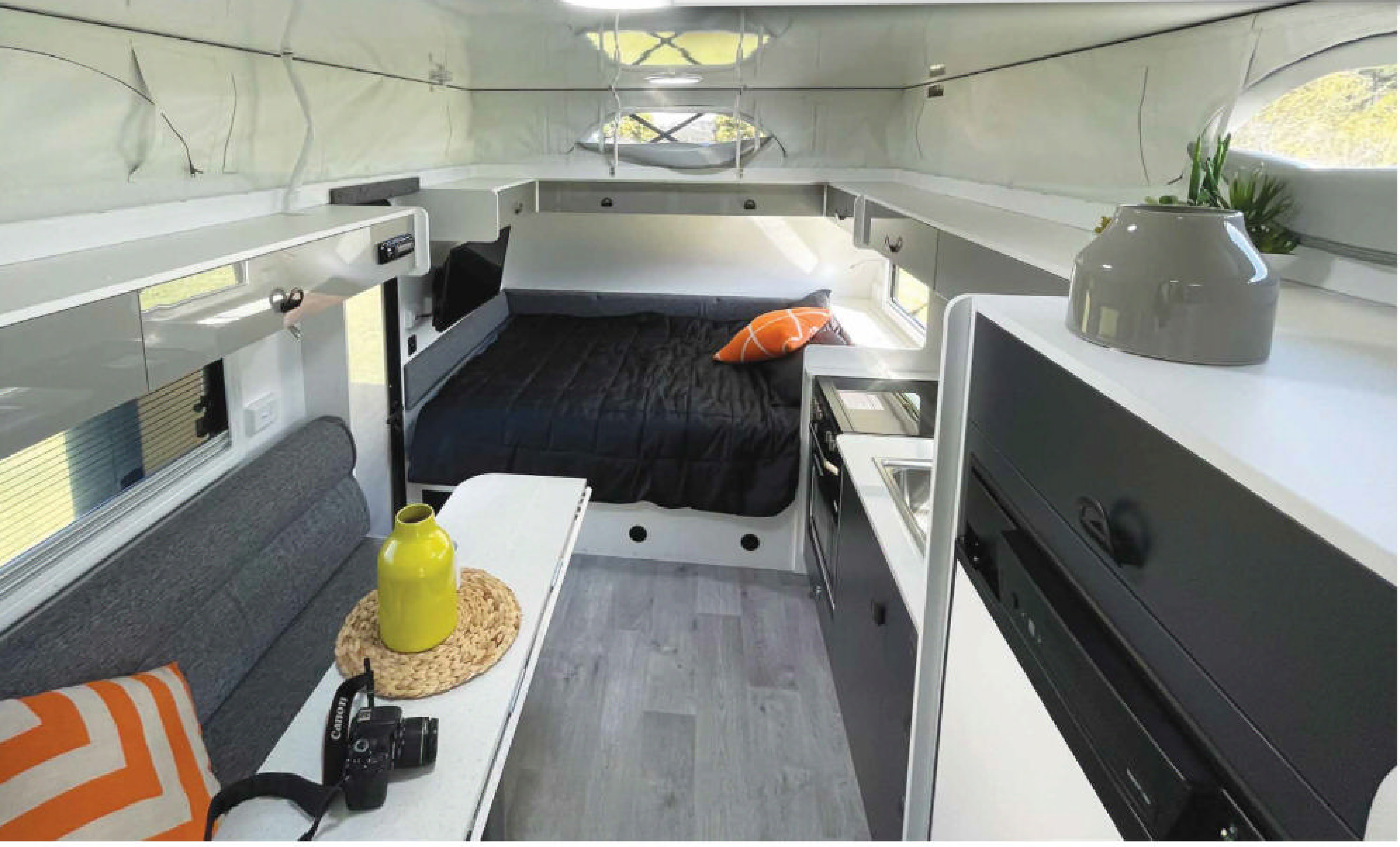
A roomy tunnel boot, Dometic awning and Lifestyle picnic table is the sort of stuff we expect to see in a van these days. The Adventurer variant has a few additional nice features to improve the outside experience. The tray on the A-frame is great for carrying a little bit of firewood, grey water hoses or perhaps some rubbish if you secure it in a strong bag. The external shower in warmer climates is a great way to keep grubby kids from messing up the van. External speakers are welcome, as is the pull out single step.

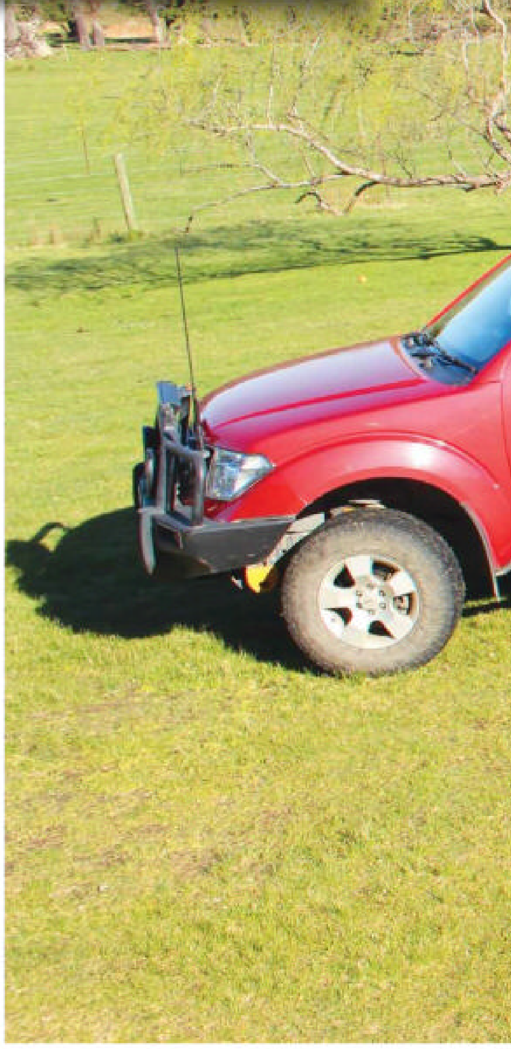
Being the nerd that I am, my favourite outside feature is the externally mounted water pump. Sure, it may be vulnerable to being bumped or perhaps even stolen but there are a bunch of benefits. It frees up storage space inside the van and keeps the noise and potential leaks outside. From a former life, managing a caravan manufacturer customer service department I can tell you a flood of water inside the van from failed plumbing is one of the more distressing incidents an owner can experience.

ROUGHING IT

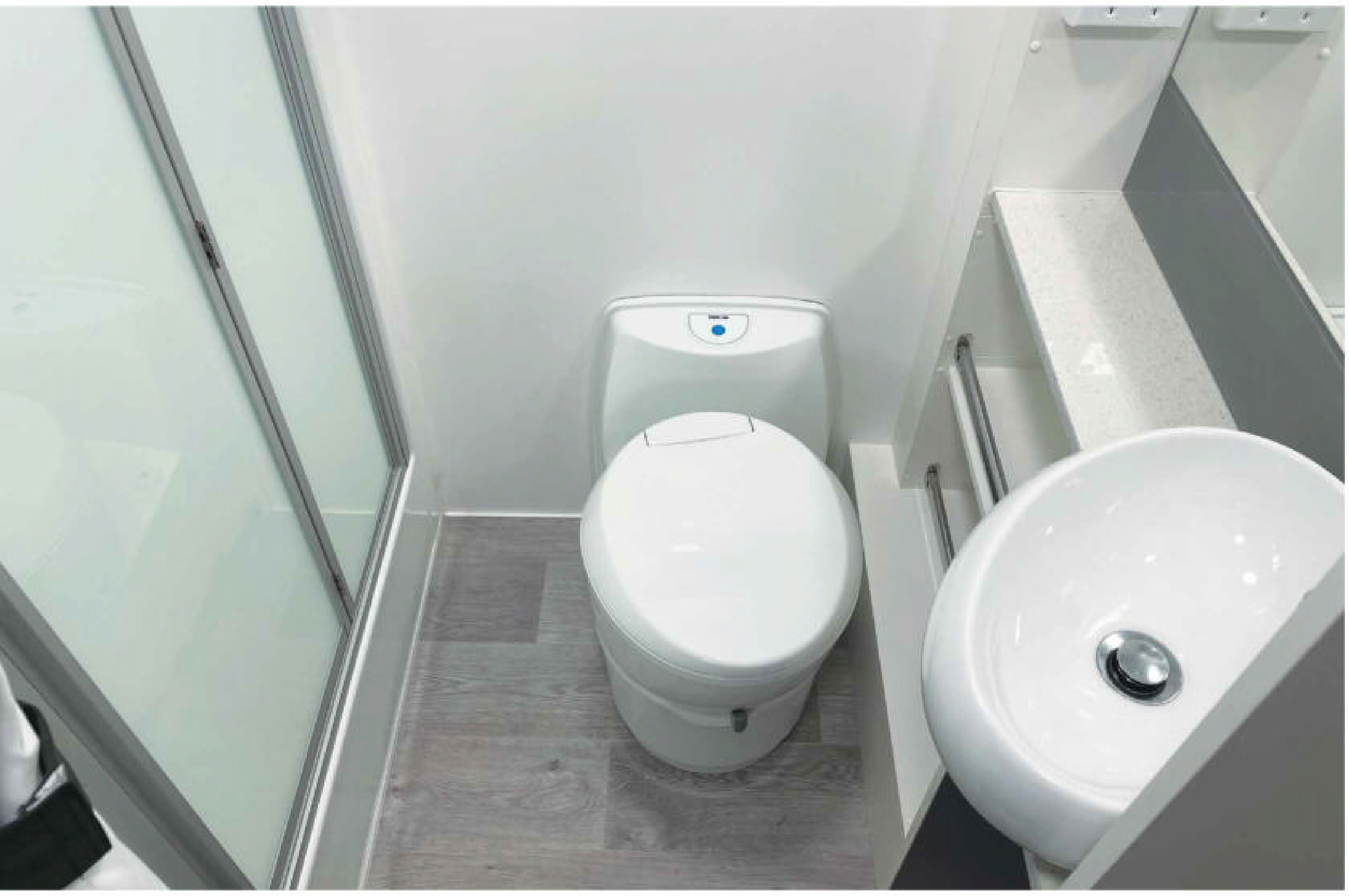
The beefed up chassis, the independent suspension, even the Adventurer name beckons the occupants to stray further afield for longer. A single 150W solar panel and 100Ah battery are acceptable minimum standards to stay off the grid for a few days. No doubt some owners will be looking to upgrade to more solar and battery capacity. Similarly, the two 110L water tanks is a tick but a grey water tank (factory option available) would need to be added to rate higher. We need to remember that New Age is trying to keep this van within the reach of many families and not everyone needs the extra cost and weight that comes with extended off grid capacity.







CLOCKWISE FROM BELOW There is a separate shower and toilet; The reverse camera is a useful addition; Additional storage is under the main east-west bed; Privacy in the bathroom is ensured by a curtain rather than a concertina door



TOWABILITY

With both van and tow vehicle relatively empty, the Road Owl followed along comfortably behind my early model Navara, but I may have had a challenged meeting this Navara's gross combined mass (GCM) requirement if both vehicles had been fully loaded. The 2890kg ATM rating makes it a viable real world weight for the 3500kg rated towing modern dual cab utes due to GCM requirements – always do your homework on your rig set up to ensure you don't get caught out with exceeding GCM.

While showing good towing manners, the van has a relatively light empty towball load (160kg). It won't hurt the balance of this van to stow some of your heavier gear in the generous front tunnel boot and the storage compartment under the main bed.

Finally, don't underestimate how much the included reverse camera is always going to improve the parking experience because they give you so much more vision than relying on just mirrors.

> “The Road Owl is a well thought out pop top up to the *job for many families. The layout works a treat*”

LEADING CUSTOMER CARE

New Age New Age Caravans offers a three year manufacturer’s warranty delivered through 15 full service dealerships and more than 100 additional authorised repairers nationally. On top of that, New Age offers one year “New Age Assist” roadside assistance membership with every new RV.

THE WRAP

The Road Owl is a well thought-out pop top which is up to the job for many families. Good design principles take into account the ‘variable height’ inherent in pop tops. The layout works a treat. The components and appliances used are reputable. With a sensible understanding of loading, the Road Owl makes a good towing companion for modern utes.

New Age offer the Road Owl in three bundled option variants. The base spec is minimalist by contemporary standards, but you save $14k and my guess 200kg or more at tare. The mid spec may prove to be a happy medium for many and the full spec will be more suited to those with semi off road aspirations. The choice is yours.

TOP TO BOTTOM The warranty is described as covering 'hitch to bumper'; It is a good towing companion for modern utes

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HISTORIC AND PICTURESQUE TASSIE

Words and Pics
CHRIS WHITELAW

Step off the mainland and spend a few weeks exploring the wonders of the North West Tasmanian Coast

It may seem strange to mention Tassie and beaches in the same sentence, but the fact is that Australia's smallest state boasts some of the most beautiful beaches in the world. Lapped by the crystal-clear waters of Bass Strait, the North West region shelters many sugar-white strands bookended by rocky headlands and backed by verdant hills that stretch inland to Cradle Country. Shadowing the Strait for 125km from Devonport to Stanley, the Bass Highway connects large urban centres and a profusion of villages, where the sea dominates lifestyle and leisure.

You'll need a couple of weeks, preferably in the summer months, to experience all that this remarkable region has to offer – spectacular geology, Indigenous culture, colonial history, busy ports, penguin rookeries, and so much more.

"The sea... was very troublesome"
151,500
BASS STRAIT
MARITIME CENTRE

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT The Nut is an imposing backdrop to Fisherman's Dock; The Bass Strait Maritime Museum is a must-see attraction in Devonport

DEVONPORT

For many travellers, especially 'vanners from the mainland, the journey to the Apple Isle begins at Port Melbourne as they board the trans-Strait ferry, *Spirit of Tasmania*, for the 10-hour voyage to Devonport. As well as being the 'Gateway to the North West,' the City of Devonport is the region's largest port and service centre for the agricultural districts that surround it. This vibrant seaport straddles the mouth of the Mersey River, 100km north-west of Launceston.

Overlooking the western side of the approach is Mersey Bluff, a volcanic relic of the Jurassic Age (199.6-145.5 million years ago), rising on 30-metre cliffs to a lighthouse with distinctive vertical red stripes along its gleaming 16m tower. It was on this headland, in 1929, that a local teacher discovered Aboriginal rock carvings estimated to be 10,000 years old depicting abalone, crayfish, periwinkles, an emu, and a seal. These are accessed by a 1km circuit that also takes in two midden sites.

In the lee of the headland, Mersey Bluff Beach is a popular venue for locals and holidaymakers alike. Fronting a grassy precinct with excellent day-use facilities, the beach is patrolled by surf lifesavers during the summer months. The Mersey Bluff Caravan Park is located nearby, as is the Bass Strait Maritime Museum in the former Harbour Master's House. Flour Mill Bay – on the other side of the river mouth – encloses East Devonport Beach, which is a short walk from the Abel Tasman Caravan Park. Located just 800m north of the *Spirit* terminal, this spacious park is a handy option for catching the early morning ferry.

SPIRIT OF TASMANIA
SPIRIT OF TASMANIA I

> *“With a deep-water harbour on Emu Bay, Burnie is Tasmania's largest general cargo and container port”*

PENGUIN

Heading west from Devonport, the Bass Highway passes through Ulverstone on the River Leven, and soon diverts onto Penguin Road (the old Bass Highway), which hugs the coast on a scenic route to the delightful seaside town of Penguin. Named for the little penguin rookeries that are common along this stretch of the coast, the town celebrates these diminutive seabirds with images on light poles and litter bins, and the 3.15m ‘Big Penguin’ statue in the centre of town.

Beecraft Point, at the northern end of Penguin Beach, has a boat ramp, while further west, Preservation Beach is a popular spot for swimming and has an occasional right-hand surf break in front of the surf club. Well-situated between the two, the compact Penguin Caravan Park lies adjacent to Johnsons Beach.

BURNIE

The bustling city of Burnie, 50km west of Devonport, is a key commercial centre and major port serving the manufacturing, forestry, and mining industries of the North West region. With a deep-water harbour on Emu Bay, Burnie is Tasmania's largest general cargo and container port, with a special facility for woodchip exports. From the 1930s, Burnie developed a large-scale industrial base and prospered on the back of a massive Associated Pulp and Paper Mills plant on the waterfront. When the plant closed in 2010, the town was forced to diversify and has since reinvented itself as a tourist destination with many first-class attractions.

Top of the must-see list is the superb Makers Workshop, housed in a spectacular award-winning building at the western end of West Beach. Part museum, part gallery and arts centre, this futuristic structure accommodates more than 20 local artisans who create textiles, jewellery, ceramics, paintings, woodwork, glassware and paper products. A licensed cafe on site offers the region’s finest produce and seafood.

Another stand-out attraction is the Burnie Regional Museum, which contains one of the largest collections of folk and cultural memorabilia in Tasmania, showcasing

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT For many travellers, the journey begins at Port Melbourne; Sunset over Sawyer Bay, Stanley

CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT The town of Penguin takes its name from the diminutive seabirds; Mersey Bluff Caravan Park overlooks the nearby beach; An elegant Regency homestead at Highfield Estate

Burnie's development from its agrarian roots in the 1800s to the industrial boom of the 20th century. The undoubted highlight is 'Federation Street,' an authentic recreation of shops and businesses common in Burnie and other North West towns in the early 1900s.

WYNYARD

Just 20km west of Burnie, travellers arrive at the pleasantly relaxed town of Wynyard on the Inglis River. From the river mouth, East Wynyard Beach forms part of a particularly beautiful stretch of coastline with panoramic views across Freestone Cove towards Table Cape. Rated as 'one of the prettiest caravan parks anywhere,' Beach Retreat Tourist Park is nestled between the beach and the river within easy walking distance of both waterfronts and the town centre.

Wynyard is an important regional hub servicing farms on the fertile hinterland, as well as commercial fishing and sawmilling. The town offers beach activities, ocean and

TASMANIA NORTH-WEST COAST CONTACTS

DEVONPORT VISITOR CENTRE
145 Rooke Street, Market Square,
Devonport
P: (03) 6420 2900
E: tourism@devonport.tas.gov.au

BURNIE VISITOR INFORMATION CENTRE
2 Bass Highway, Parklands
P: (03) 6430 5885

WYNYARD VISITOR INFORMATION CENTRE
8 Exhibition Link (off Jackson Street),
Wynyard
P: (03) 6443 8330

STANLEY VISITOR CENTRE
45 Main Street, Stanley
P: (03) 6458 1330

DISCOVERY PARKS — DEVONPORT
13-19 Tarleton Street, East Devonport
P: 1800 880 201 or (03) 6427 8418
E: devonport@discoveryparks.com.au
W: discoveryholidayparks.com.au

MERSEY BLUFF CARAVAN PARK
41 Bluff Road, Devonport
P: (03) 6424 8655
E: bookings@mbcp.net.au
W: merseybluffcaravanpark.com.au

ABEL TASMAN CARAVAN PARK
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E: info@abeltasmancaravanpark.com.au
W: abeltasmancaravanpark.com.au

BIG4 ULVERSTONE HOLIDAY PARK
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P: (03) 6425 2624
E: info@big4ulverstone.com.au
W: big4.com.au/ulverstone

PENGUIN CARAVAN PARK
6 Johnson's Beach Road
P: 03 6437 2785
E: penguincaravanpark@hotmail.com
W: penguincaravanpark.com.au

BURNIE HOLIDAY CARAVAN PARK
253 Bass Highway, Burnie
P: (03) 6431 1925
E: motel@burniebeachaccommodation.com.au
W: burniebeachaccommodation.com.au

BEACH RETREAT TOURIST PARK
30b Old Bass Highway, Wynyard
P: (03) 6442 1998
W: beachretreattouristpark.com.au

LEISURE VILLE HOLIDAY PARK
145 Old Bass HWY, Wynyard
P: (03) 6442 2291
E: mail@leisureville.com.au
W: leisureville.com.au

STANLEY CABIN & TOURIST PARK
23a Wharf Road, Stanley
P: (03) 6458 1266
E: enquiries@stanleycabinpark.com.au
W: stanleycabinpark.com.au

river fishing, waterside walks, and scenic drives through a picturesque landscape that includes the unique landmarks of Fossil Bluff and Table Cape.

TABLE CAPE

Guarding the northern end of Freestone Cove is the imposing bulk of Table Cape, 5 kilometres from Wynyard. Named by Matthew Flinders in 1798, this flat-topped promontory is what remains of a lava lake that pooled in a volcanic crater about 13 million years ago. Erosion has stripped away the crater's soft, sloping sides to expose the basalt core that now towers 170m above the sea.

Roughly circular and about 1.5km in diameter, the Cape's plateau is covered in fertile volcanic soil and is heavily cultivated for crops and grazing. A premier attraction in spring is the Table Cape Tulip Farm, which is ablaze in colour with the flowering of some 4 million bulbs, celebrated in Wynyard's annual Bloomin Tulip Festival. On the seaward edge of the plateau stands the heritage-listed Table Cape Lighthouse. Built in 1888, it is the only operating lighthouse open for public tours (September-April) in Tasmania.

BOAT HARBOUR BEACH

A 10-minute drive from Wynyard brings coastal tourers to Boat Harbour Beach – possibly the most beautiful village and beach in Tasmania. More a locality than a town, this tiny ramshackle community tumbles down a steep forested hillside to a postcard-perfect beach looking out onto Bass Strait. Sheltered between rocky headlands in a north-facing cove, the crescent of powdery white sand is lapped by sapphire-blue waters of exceptional clarity – well justifying its frequent inclusion among Australia's top ten beaches.

Few businesses operate in Boat Harbour – some B&Bs, a shop with fuel and a beachside bar and cafe. The main attraction is the beach whose usually placid waters are ideal for family-friendly aquatic recreation: safe swimming in the patrolled surf, diving and snorkelling around the inshore reefs, fishing off the rocky points, kayaking, paddle-boarding, and exploring the tidal pools. Boat Harbour Beach Caravan Park has cabins and offers powered sites for small-medium vans, plus grassy space for campers.

ROCKY CAPE NP

Thirty kilometres north-west of Wynyard, Rocky Cape National Park encompasses 3000 hectares of stunning coastal scenery – ancient quartzite geology contorted into rolling hills that sweep down to a jagged coastline of windswept headlands interspersed with tranquil bays and small, secluded beaches. For such an exposed location, the park harbours an amazing diversity of vegetation – including wildflowers that produce colourful displays in spring and early summer, attracting a wonderful array of birdlife.

Rocky Cape forms part of the traditional lands of the Peerapper Aboriginal people, and several rock shelters and caves bear witness to their continuous occupation here for over 8000 years. North Cave and South Cave are two of the most significant habitation sites, containing huge midden deposits of shells, seal and fish bones, stone tools, and charcoal. Though small and only for day-use, Rocky Cape offers visitors a rich and varied experience that includes swimming, diving, fishing, boating, and beachcombing, as well as bushwalks that range from 20-minute strolls to half-day circuits and eight-hour treks.

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE A secluded cove in Rocky Cape National Park; The wharf facilities and tourist precinct at Stanley; The Rocky Cape Lighthouse has splendid views; Tatlows Beach glistens in a low-tide sunrise; The heritage-listed Van Diemen's Land Store in Stanley

TRADITIONAL OWNERS

The Traditional Owners of North West Tasmania are the Peerapper people. We pay respects to Elders past, present, and emerging.

This property is classified by the National Trust of Australia (Tasmania)

STANLEY

The journey along the North West coast arrives at last at its most northerly settlement, Stanley, 125km from Devonport. Established by the Van Diemen's Company for its headquarters in 1826, historic Stanley lies at the end of a sandy isthmus, nestled against the base of Circular Head. Known locally as 'The Nut,' this massive headland was formed about 13 million years ago as the core of an active volcano and later exposed by erosion to stand 152m on sheer cliffs above the surrounding ocean. This extraordinary landform can be ascended by a steep walking track or a relaxing five-minute ride on a chairlift, to a plateau with panoramic views of Bass Strait and the surrounding countryside.

The town continues its historical role as the region's main port with live cattle and cargo shipments, and a busy fishing industry handling a wide variety of Bass Strait seafood. Sheltered in the south-eastern lee of Circular Head, the wharf facilities at Fisherman's Dock add nautical charm to the town's appeal as a picturesque tourist destination, as well as providing a popular venue for recreational anglers.

Visitors looking for an aquatic experience are spoiled for choice with two excellent beaches. Tatlows Beach is a long, shallow bar facing Sawyer Bay on the eastern side of the isthmus. It's usually a low-energy beach but strong tidal currents sweeping along it can be hazardous. The Stanley Cabin & Tourist Park is located just behind the beachfront. Protected from strong westerly winds in a small cove to the north of the town, Godfreys Beach is better for swimming, surfing and fishing, but waves breaking at low tide can produce rips. The headland at its southern end hosts a Little Penguin rookery.

The town is a beautiful place to wander, with many fine heritage buildings and well-maintained weatherboard cottages forming a colourful streetscape sprinkled with craft shops, cafes, galleries, and boutique accommodation. A good place to start is the Stanley Discovery Museum, which houses a wealth of relics, antiques, memorabilia, photographs, and documents that narrate the town's history.

An outstanding example of Stanley's colonial heritage is Highfield Estate, set on a hill 2km north of the township. The elegant Regency-style homestead was completed in 1835 as the residence for Edward Curr, chairman of the Van Diemen's Land Company. The historic precinct includes a large number of bluestone outbuildings, including a chapel, servants' quarters, barns and stables, as well as excellent views of Stanley and The Nut. The house and grounds are open for inspection by the public and on guided tours.

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NEWCASTLE - Parravans **P: (02) 4983 1551**
WESTERN AUSTRALIA - Eternity Caravans **P: (08) 9568 1867**
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THE TOP TOW TUGS ON OFFER

With new models landing and upgrades to some of Australia's best-selling tow rigs during 2021, there's choice aplenty in the towing landscape.

Words Mark Quinlan **Pics** Archives and supplied

While 2022 will hopefully bring an end to restrictions on international travel and the opening of all Australian borders, it's likely that the boom in caravan and camping will continue, as Aussies continue to explore our magnificent Big Backyard.

Regardless of whether your accommodation options extend to a mobile palace on wheels, a durable offroad camper trailer, or simply pitching a tent in a remote location, the common thread is we all need wheels to get there.

The good news is that 2021 saw several impressive new arrivals, along with updates to existing models, so there's choice aplenty, from lightweight soft-roaders like the Subaru Outback, to the seriously heavy-duty Chevrolet Silverado, and everything in between.

Just remember to always be aware of state government towing regulations and to read the fine print of your vehicle owner's manual to ensure you comply with all relevant towing limits, restrictions, and conditions.

With that in mind, here's our guide to some of the best tow rigs available for you to choose from in 2022.

ISUZU D-MAX X-TERRAIN (300)

The current version of Isuzu's sturdy workhorse D-MAX has found plenty of fans since arriving here in August 2020 – so much so that with COVID-19 supply chain interruptions, people who ordered their ute in 2021 are still awaiting delivery.

That cloud may have a silver lining, however, with Isuzu announcing an updated MY22 D-MAX landing in December 2021, meaning some customers can expect this newer version when they eventually take delivery.

Key changes include a new entry level 1.9L turbodiesel engine option for the SX Single Cab Chassis 4x2, a new trim level in the LS-U+, deletion of some slow-selling variants, and additional body styles on certain specs.

The big news for the towing fraternity is that all D-MAX 4x4 utes have had their gross combination mass (GCM) upgraded by 50kg to 6000kg.

Another handy addition is a factory-fitted tow bar kit on LS-U, LS-U+ and X-Terrain as standard, and inclusion of a steering wheel-mounted switch that deactivates the sometimes-intrusive lane support system.

There's plenty of choice in the expanded and expansive model line-up, and recreational buyers will likely be drawn to the top-spec D-MAX X-Terrain, with its sports bar, roof rails, 18in alloys, and roller tonneau cover. The X-Terrain also copped some extra kit with the MY22 upgrade, including red stitching on the leather-accented upholstery trim, an auto-dimming rear-view mirror and heated front seats.

Under the bonnet is Isuzu's proven 3L turbodiesel, which channels its competitive 140kW/450Nm through a six-speed auto transmission, a part-time 4WD system with high and low range, and a selectable rear differential lock.

Significant chassis and suspension changes make the current D-Max nicer on road than its predecessor, with notably better steering, handling and road holding, and it's also much safer, thanks to a comprehensive suite of advanced driver assistance features.

CW DRIVEN

> "We've towed almost everything everywhere with a D-MAX, from a camper to Sturt NP, to a full-bodied van in the Vic High Country. Strong, dependable and a pleasure to drive. Expect 12–15L/100km with a camper and 17–20L/100km with a big van" - *Tim van Duyl*

SPECIFICATIONS

ISUZU D-MAX CREW CAB UTE LS-M

Price: (MRLP): $62,990 (Drive Away)
Engine: 3L four-cylinder turbodiesel (140kW/450Nm)
Transmission: Six-speed automatic
Towing unbraked/braked: 750kg/3500kg
Kerb weight: 2165kg
Gross Vehicle Mass: 3100kg
Payload: 935kg
Gross Combined Mass: 6000kg
Fuel Capacity: 76L
Fuel Consumption: 8L/100km (ADR Combined Cycle)
Safety Rating: 5-Star ANCAP (2020)
Warranty: 6 years, 150,000km

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE The D-MAX has the grunt for most vans out there; A benefit of the dual cab ute is the tray; A variety of new options are on the table for the new iteration

CW DRIVEN

> "It is no surprise the BT-50 feels the same as the brilliant D-MAX — its underpinnings are the same. The look is a bit more retrained, but expect it to drive and consume just the same." *- Tim van Duyl*

MAZDA BT-50 XTR (298)

Like Isuzu, Mazda benefitted for getting out in front of its rivals with its all-new ute in 2020, making hay while it was still the new kid on the block. But the competition is closing fast, with the new Ford Ranger due in mid-2022 and the Volkswagen Amarok in 2023.

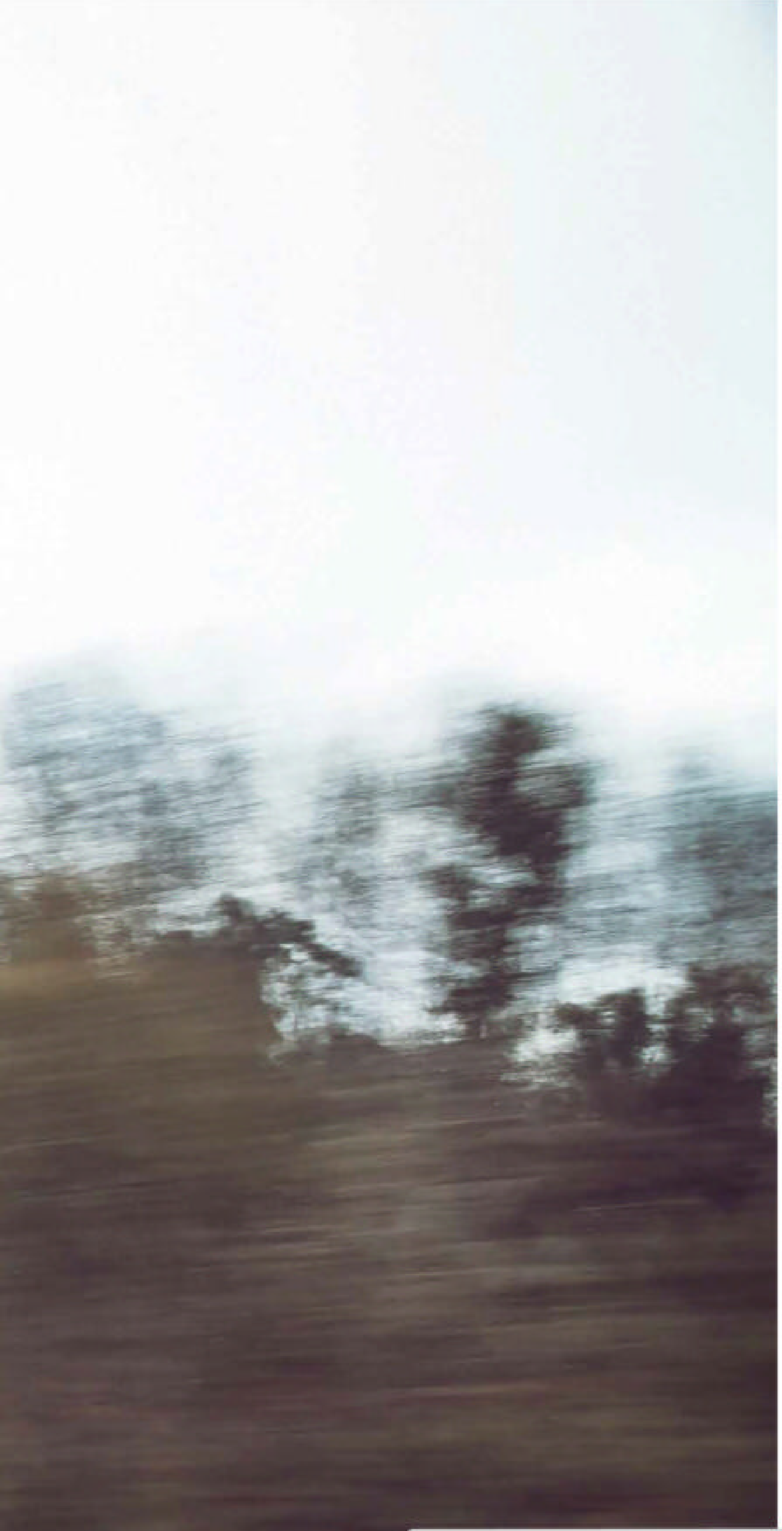
The impending threat prompted Mazda to recently update its still-fresh BT-50 range with the same switchable lane departure system as its twin-under-the-skin the Isuzu D-Max, plus the 110kW/350Nm 1.9L turbodiesel on a new entry level XS variant, that in this case is available in both 4x2 and 4x4. The smaller engine has a lower 3-tonne towing capacity so is unlikely to be chosen by *Caravan World* readers, who will instead opt for the gutsier 3L with its 3500kg rating.

If you're looking for something a bit more distinctive, then the SP and Thunder variants bring extra flair and features, but we prefer to keep the admission price low by choosing a model with all the essential kit at the best price, which in this case is the XTR.

The BT-50 shares its platform, power train and advanced driver-assistance features with the D-MAX, but Mazda differentiates its workhorse with unique exterior styling, different model grades and a slightly richer mix of standard features.

The XTR sits one from the top in the BT-50 range and drives well, with strong performance, well-sorted dynamics (by category standards), equal class-leading safety features, and a cabin that's nicely insulated from road and engine noise.

It's also notably more upmarket inside than some of the work-oriented D-MAX models, with an attractive dash design and quality switchgear, as well as dual-zone climate control, 9in touchscreen with wireless Apple CarPlay and Android Auto, satellite navigation, digital radio, reversing camera, adaptive cruise control and keyless entry.



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Inside the BT-50 is sleek and stylish; Updated to get ahead of the competition, there's plenty to like here; Exterior styling stand outs from the crowd

SPECIFICATIONS

MAZDA BT-50 XTR DUAL CAB PICKUP 4X4

Price: (MRLP): $56,490
Engine: 3L four-cylinder turbodiesel (140kW/450Nm)
Transmission: Six-speed automatic
Towing unbraked/braked: 750kg/3500kg
Kerb weight: 2030kg
Gross Vehicle Mass: 3100kg
Payload: 1070kg
Gross Combined Mass: 5950kg
Fuel Capacity: 76L
Fuel Consumption: 8L/100km (ADR Combined Cycle)
Safety Rating: 5-Star ANCAP (2020)
Warranty: 5 years/unlimited km

TOYOTA HILUX SR5+ (299)

Toyota responded to 2020's twin-pronged attack from the all-new D-MAX and BT-50 twins with a major facelift of its market-leading HiLux, injecting new vigour into its proven 1GR turbo-diesel engine, and improving the ute's ride and handling. A suite of new advanced driver assistance features was also added, although it doesn't quite match the full extent of what's offered by the aforementioned rivals, who set the class safety standards.

The revitalised 2.8L four-cylinder engine feels more sprightly thanks to a handy bump in power and torque of 20kW and 50Nm, while changes to suspension and steering make an appreciable difference to its towing and load hauling performance. A standard rear diff lock matches its rivals, but extra rear suspension travel and well-tuned traction control system give HiLux a definite advantage offroad.

Both exterior and interior styling have also been upgraded, including a new 8in multimedia screen with factory sat-nav, Apple CarPlay and Android Auto connectivity.

In August 2021, Toyota countered upgrades from its rivals by fitting Toyota Connected Services as standard on all model grades. The system automatically generates an emergency call to Toyota's 24/7 Emergency Call Centre and relays the location of the vehicle in the event of a collision that requires intervention, or if an airbag deploys. Occupants can also manually trigger an emergency call to the call centre via an SOS button, which provides the vehicle's location. Toyota Connected Services can also track the vehicle's location if it is stolen.

New interior comfort and convenience features added to the popular SR5 and SR5+ include an upgraded front dual-zone climate control system. The SR5+ commands a $2500 price premium over the SR5 Dual Cab 4x4, but adds 8-way power-adjustable driver's seat, heated front pews, and a leather-accented interior to create a suitably luxurious tourer, town car, and tow rig.

CLOCKWISE FROM BELOW An 8in screen dominates the dash; Toyota's offering has plenty to like; It felt a little more sluggish at times than other dual cab utes

SPECIFICATIONS

TOYOTA HILUX SR5+

Price (MRLP): $63,180
Engine: 2.8L four-cylinder turbodiesel (150kW/500Nm)
Transmission: Six-speed automatic
Towing unbraked/braked: 750kg/3500kg
Kerb Weight: 2110kg
Gross Vehicle Mass: 3050kg
Payload: 1105kg
Gross Combined Mass: 5850kg
Fuel Capacity: 80L
Fuel Consumption: 7.9L/100km (ADR Combined Cycle)
Safety Rating: 5-Star ANCAP (2019)
Warranty: 5 years/unlimited km

CW DRIVEN

> "I wasn't as impressed as I thought I should be jumping out of the SR5. It felt a bit more sluggish than expected and pulling a compact camper, it used a bit more fuel that expected at around 15L/100km."
> *- Tim van Duyl*

CW DRIVEN

> "Its direct coupling view makes hitching up a cinch and once you've entered the type and dimensions of what you're towing, various warning lights and alarms will inform you, like a cat's whiskers, whether you and your trailer will fit." *- Michael Browning*

WONDERLAND RV
XTR 1906
DEFENDER
N CB 87K

CLOCKWISE FROM BELOW The new model Land Rover has the grunt of the original with a little more finesse; A variety of tech updates will help when heading offroad

SPECIFICATIONS

LAND ROVER DEFENDER 110 D250

Price: $82,466 (MRLP)
Engine: 3L inline six-cylinder twin turbodiesel (183kW/570Nm)
Transmission: Eight speed automatic
Towing unbraked/braked: 750kg/3500kg
Kerb Weight: 2,385kg (5 seats)/2,441kg (5+2 seats)
Gross Vehicle Mass: 3200kg (5 seats)/3,280kg (5+2 seats)
Payload: 815kg (5-seats)/839kg (5+2 seats)
Gross Combined Mass: 6700kg (5 seats)/6780kg (7 seats)
Fuel Capacity: 89L
Fuel Consumption: 7.9L/100km (ADR Combined Cycle)
Safety Rating: 5-Star ANCAP (2020)
Warranty: 5 years/unlimited km

LAND ROVER DEFENDER 110 D250 (309)

Land Rover's new Defender launched in 2020 in long wheelbase form only and without the requisite diesel engine option that is the default choice for most people towing anything substantial. As impressive as the 3L petrol six cylinder is, the arrival of the new diesel engine was met with cheers by those who prefer their tow rigs to speak with a distinctly British accent.

The Defender's 3.0L, six-cylinder twin-turbodiesel engine is available in two states of tune in the preferred 110 long wheelbase version, depending on the specification level. The entry level D250 puts out 183kW/570Nm and sips the oily stuff at a claimed 7.9L/100km, while the higher output D300 develops a more muscular 220kW/650Nm and, bizarrely, identical consumption. The diesel's muscular peak torque arrives at a low 1250rpm and is channelled to all corners via a responsive eight speed automatic.

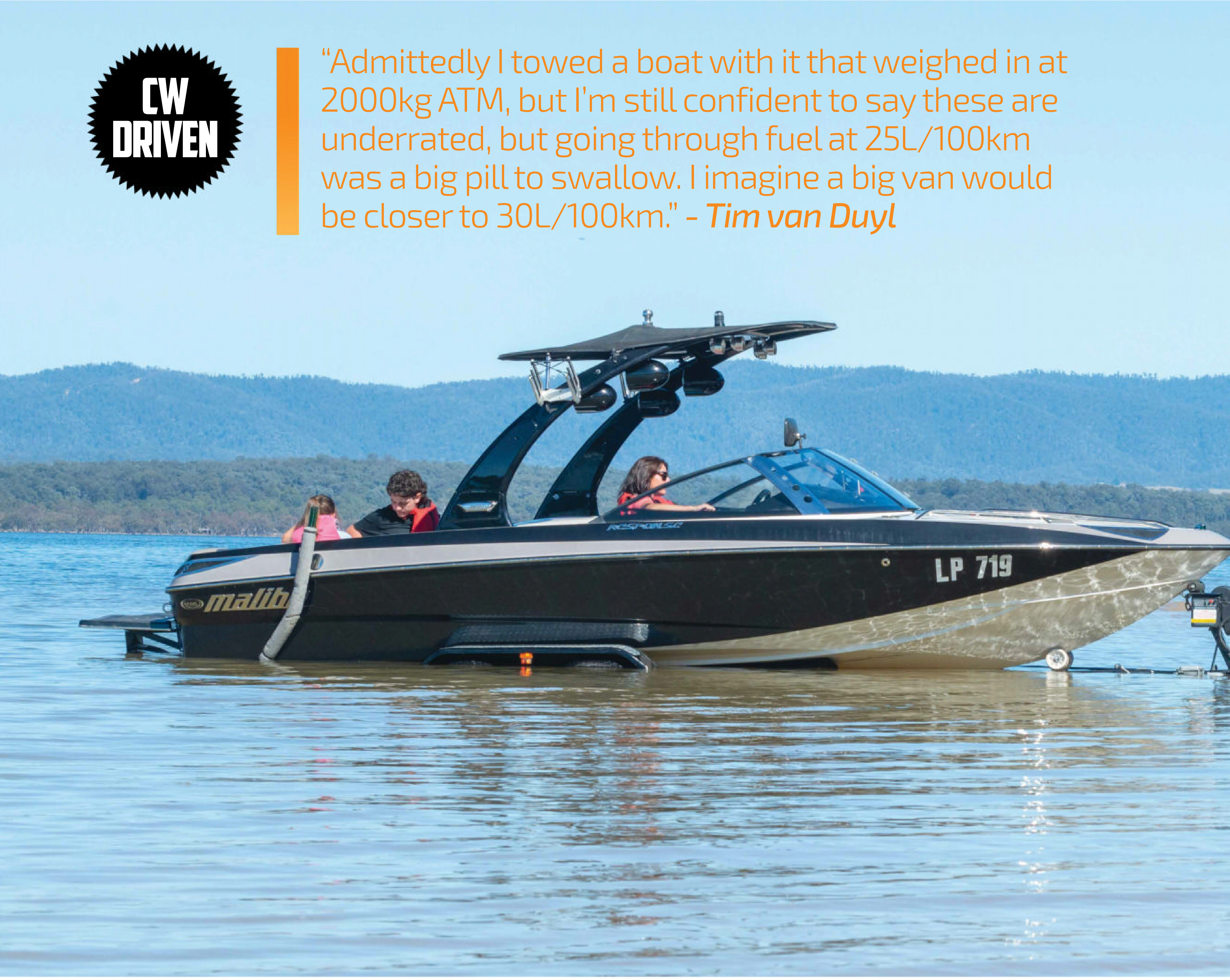
Inside and out, there are nods to the Defender's utilitarian roots, including truncated front and rear overhangs, sturdy grab handles and heavy-duty rubber flooring, which contrast with the digital dash and hi-tech underpinnings.

But where earlier Defenders were rugged, basic vehicles, this new model is anything but, underpinned as it is by sophisticated electronic traction aids, fully independent suspension with optional variable ride height air springs, and a battery of cameras providing various offroad and trailer hitching views. With seating for five, six or seven, a generous cargo bay and an intriguing and practical interior design, the Defender is one of the most capable new 4x4s available, but its six-figure price tag and expensive options may deter some buyers.

As we went to press Land Rover advised that the D250 will only be available until April 2022, after which the D300 will be the sole diesel powerplant in the brand's MY23 offerings, so anyone looking to secure the more keenly priced D250 had best get their skates on.

CW DRIVEN

> "Admittedly I towed a boat with it that weighed in at 2000kg ATM, but I'm still confident to say these are underrated, but going through fuel at 25L/100km was a big pill to swallow. I imagine a big van would be closer to 30L/100km." *- Tim van Duyl*



NISSAN PATROL TI (299)

Lots of people who tow will turn and run a mile when told the Y62 Nissan Patrol wagon is available only with a petrol V8, and no turbodiesel option, despite its hulking LandCruiser-like dimensions. That's a shame because if you can live with its laden drinking habits, Nissan's 5.6L V8 is a beauty.

Smooth and powerful, the responsive bent eight delivers its syrupy power through a flawless seven-speed automatic. It's surprisingly fuel-efficient, too, at least when unladen and provided you don't sink the slipper too hard, too often.

The muscular drivetrain handles towing duties with aplomb, and the Ti's steel sprung fully independent suspension is arguably a better bet for towing duties than the air-sprung Ti-L, which allows a bit more roll and yaw than is ideal. Despite the luxuriously appointed Ti-L boasting near-LandCruiser Sahara levels of kit for around $40k less, we'd recommend the still well-equipped Patrol Ti and putting the $15k saving towards fuel. At least the large 140-L fuel tank extends the time between fills, although the hi-tech V8 does prefer costly 95 RON fuel or higher.

A 2020 update added a suite of advanced driver assistance systems (ADAS) to both models, including intelligent emergency braking, forward collision warning and rear cross traffic alert, while also bringing features that were previously exclusive to the Ti-L down to the Ti. These include intelligent cruise control (ICC), lane departure warning (LDW), intelligent lane intervention, blind spot warning (BSW) and intelligent blind spot intervention.

It all adds up to a pretty compelling package despite the Y62 Patrol now being 12-years old, a fact that helped Nissan rack up solid sales in 2021 as people looked for alternatives to the LandCruiser 200 Series, which became as rare as rocking horse poo before the arrival of the 300 Series.

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Get past the fact it is a petrol engine, and this is a beauty of a car; This boat was no problems behind the Nissan

SPECIFICATIONS

NISSAN PATROL TI

Price: $78,910 (MRLP)
Engine: 5.6:, quad cam, direct-injection, petrol V8 (298kW/560Nm)
Transmission: Eight speed automatic
Towing unbraked/braked: 750kg/3500kg
Kerb Weight: 2715kg
Gross Vehicle Mass: 3500kg
Payload: 785kg
Gross Combined Mass: 7000kg
Fuel Capacity: 140L
Fuel Consumption: 14.4L/100km (ADR Combined Cycle)
Safety Rating: Not Rated by ANCAP
Warranty: 5 years/unlimited km

TOYOTA LANDCRUISER 300 SERIES GXL (296)

The LandCruiser 200 Series' incredible 14-year model run finally came to end in 2021, creating a scramble and leading to record prices for the last of the highly regarded 4x4 wagon.

Unfortunately, supply chain dramas in Japan and elsewhere mean that even early bird customers for the new-from-the-ground-up 300 Series won't see their new rigs until early 2022. But when they do get behind the wheel, no doubt the first question will be whether the new 3.3L twin-turbodiesel V6 can match the legendary performance of its 4.5L V8 diesel predecessor. Toyota says that's a no-brainer, and that the smaller and more hi-tech 3.3L has no problems doing the hard yards expected of its heavy-duty wagon, citing its increased power and torque, and superior fuel efficiency.

The 300 Series maintains LandCruiser's traditional body on frame structure, but engineering enhancements have delivered greater rigidity, better weight distribution and a lower centre of gravity, all of which auger well for towing performance.

While towing capacity remains the same as the 200 Series, the weight reductions have delivered payload increases of 40-90kg depending on model. Newly developed independent front and four-link rear suspension systems provide increased offroad wheel articulation and superior on-road dynamics, while the new GR Sport and Sahara ZX variants come with a fancy new electronic kinetic dynamic suspension system (e-KDSS), which promises to expand the 'Cruiser's already impressive breadth of offroad capability.

Weight reductions across the range and the adoption of a new 10-speed automatic aid both performance and fuel efficiency, but there are also price rises of between 5.6 and 11.3 per cent depending on variant.

Every 300 Series model comes equipped with a trailer wiring harness, plus Toyota's newly introduced Connected Services technology, which includes automatic collision notification, an SOS button, and stolen-vehicle tracking.

SPECIFICATIONS

TOYOTA LANDCRUISER 300 SERIES GXL

Price: $101,790 (MRLP)
Engine: 3.3 twin-turbodiesel V6 (227kW/700Nm)
Transmission: 10-speed automatic
Towing unbraked/braked: 750kg/3500kg
Kerb Weight: 2580kg
Gross Vehicle Mass: 3280kg
Payload: 700kg
Gross Combined Mass: 6750kg
Fuel Capacity: 110L
Fuel Consumption: 8.9L/100km (ADR Combined Cycle)
Safety Rating: Not yet rated by ANCAP
Warranty: 5 years/unlimited km

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Replacing the beloved 200 Series, the 300 Series more than does the job; A range of new functions will make trips that much easier; Its set to hit our shores early this year

CW DRIVEN

> "On the road, the new 300 is generally a better drive — certainly the steering felt more consistent around the corners and under braking I didn't get the feeling of instability with the van on the back. It had electric brakes fitted of course." *- Malcolm Street*

TOYOTA
GR
KDR·549

IN BRIEF

- Family offroad caravan
- Customisable layout in design stage
- Cruisemaster XT independent Airbag Suspension
- Cruisemaster Slide Stand

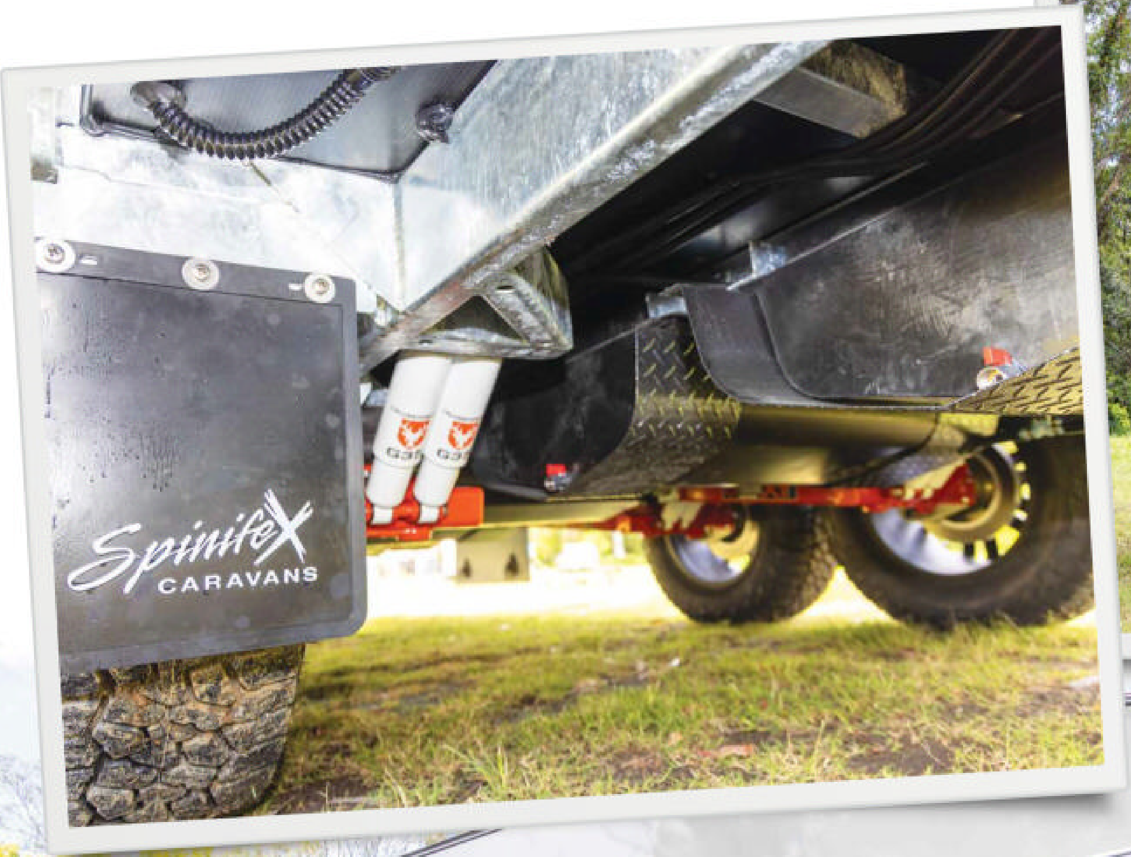
Spinifex
CARAVANS
Spinifex
NOMADIX
Premier

ALL IN THE DETAIL

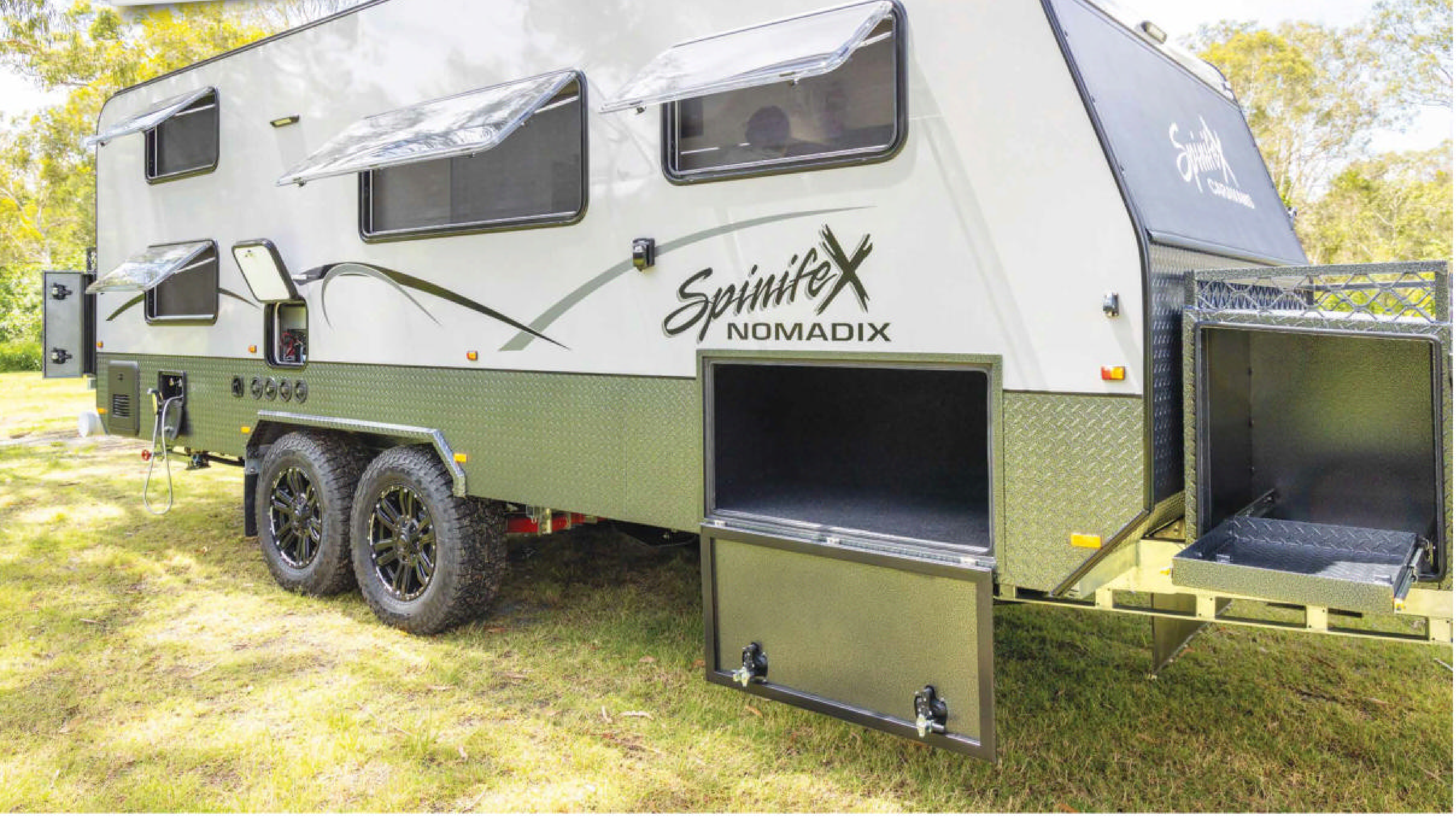
The level of attention to detail that Spinifex has gone to with their vans, and in particular the NomadiX Premier, is refreshing.

Words and Pics Gary Tischer

CLOCKWISE FROM BELOW Underneath is Cruismaster suspension and protected water tanks; Galvanised chassis and 5t hitch are upffront; It's an off-grid van you can take offroad; Easy access to storage and the external shower



Spinifex
CARAVANS



This is a van that you really can take offroad to get to that special spot away from it all, and then stay off-grid for an extended time in comfort.

Two things are needed for this to be possible – plenty of power and plenty of water. This Spinifex NomadiX Premier has these in bulk. With 415L of fresh water for showering/washing and a separate 83L for drinking water, you don't need to wait for rain. The solar input is 1160W, which feeds the 400Ah of lithium batteries, and there's a 3000W inverter to run everything including the aircon. Need I say more.

THE COMPANY

Spinifex Caravans has been around for about 16 years and is based in south-east Queensland where it manufactures its vans from the ground up. Customers fly in from as far away as Perth to visit the factory where they will spend the best part of a day going through all the design features of their particular van. There are some starting layouts, but each customer will have different needs, and these are incorporated at the design stage – the brochure even has scale drawings with internal layout features you can cut out and move around the layout diagram before you even get to the factory. A simple idea, but really useful for the customer.

THE BUILD

Spinifex have a good range of quality assurance processes that ensure the utmost quality of their vans. Once the design has been agreed on by the customer, the van is built onsite from the chassis up – this includes jigs to ensure that each chassis is manufactured to exacting precision. They are built from 350-grade Australian BlueScope steel and are then hot dipped galvanised.

Supporting the strong chassis is Cruisemaster XT independent Airbag Suspension with twin heavy duty shock absorbers and level 4 air control. Once you have used airbag suspension you will never go back. Arriving in camp and levelling the van is easy with airbags – no more blocks and chocks to contend with to get it level.

The wheel offsets and stud pattern can normally be matched to the tow vehicle, with the wheels being fitted with 285/70R17 BFG KO2 tyres. It's the small details that matter so it's fitted with great tyres from the start. The front of the chassis sports the Hitch-Ezy 5 tonne offroad coupling. This is a quality bit of kit and works simply, easily and safely, which is what you need when hitching the van to the vehicle.

MEASURING UP

PROS

- Great family van to go anyway and stay there
- Attention to detail and number of inclusions double bunks so will suit a family of four

CONS

- You'll need a good tow vehicle as all inclusions add weight
- High cost but worth it if you can stump up the cash

CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT Air suspension control has easy access; Step inside and enjoy; Understated external design keeps it looking sleek and modern

SPINIFEX NOMADIX
PREMIER 20.6

WEIGHTS AND MEASURES
Body length 6.25m (20ft 6in)
Overall length 9.2m (30ft 2in)
Width 2.45m (8ft 1in)
Height 3.1m (10ft 2in)
Tare 3040kg
ATM 4500kg
Payload 1460kg (calculated)
Ball weight 250kg

EXTERNAL
Frame/Cladding N/A
Chassis Hot-dipped galvanised
Suspension Cruisemaster XT
Coupling 5000kg Hitch-Ezy
Brakes Electric/hydraulic disc
Wheels 17in alloy
Water 5 x 83L fresh, 1 x drinking water, 1 x 83L grey water tank
Battery 2 x 200Ah Lithium
Solar 1160W
Air-conditioner Truma Adventa
Gas 2 x 9kg

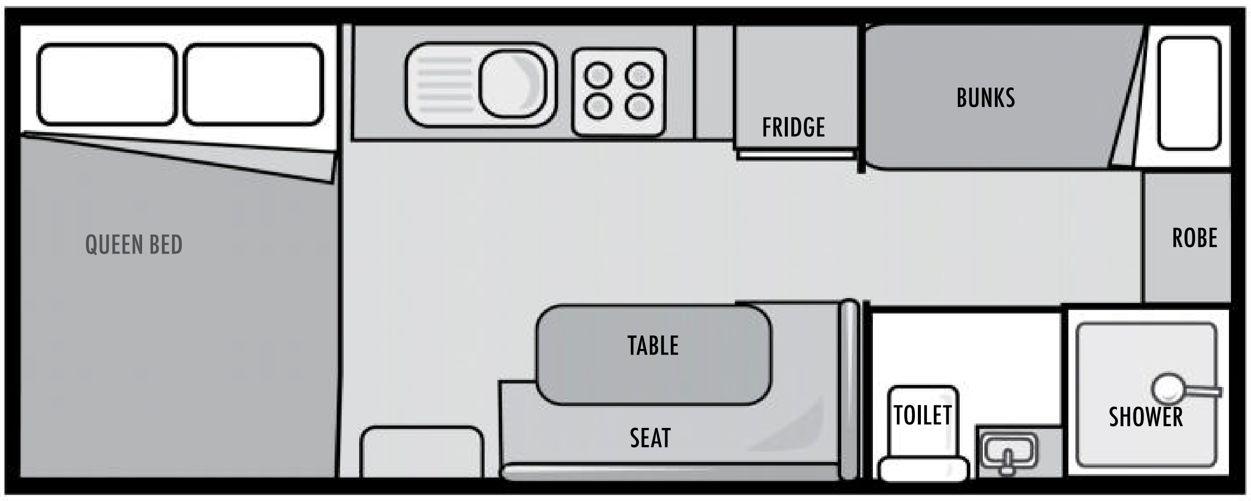
INTERNAL
Cooking 4 x gas, cooktop and range hood
Microwave Yes
Fridge 285L Bushman Compressor
Ensuite Shower, vanity and toilet
Hot water Truma gas instant
WiFi Yes, throughout the van and can be extended to outside
Van odometer Yes, based on gps distance travelled
Van tracking GPS monitor
Television 32in smart tv

PRICE FROM
$185,000

OPTIONS FITTED
- 285L fridge
- Slide out kitchen
- Rear storage box
- Additional 460W solar

AS TESTED
$192,000

MORE INFORMATION
Spinifex Caravans
21 Imboon St,
Deception Bay, QLD 4508
Ph: (07) 3888 2221
W: spinifexcaravans.com.au



Mounted onto the top of the chassis is the one-piece composite insulated floor panel. This forms the base for the rest of the build. Walls are created using full interlocking aluminium C-channel with 3mm ply attached forming the internal walls. This creates solid attachment points for all of the internal cabinetry.

The wiring is run throughout the walls using nylon bushes, and the wall cavity is insulated with custom shaped solid insulation. The outside cladding is heavy duty one-piece core matt reinforced fibreglass wall and roof panels. As the van is built, photos are taken of the all the detail including wall wiring and structure which is provided to the customer. This is invaluable if they ever want to add additional features after the van is completed.

Windows are double glazed, tinted and have midge proof screens so you can let in the light and breeze without the bugs. The door is triple locking with crimsafe and midge mesh to keep out both the bugs and undesirables. Built into the roof is an antenna for a GPS tracker and a service odometer. The

odometer will give you the distance travelled by the van rather than relying on guess work to book in the van for a service – yes, caravan suspension needs servicing otherwise you risk a ceased bearing somewhere down a distant track.

The seven poly water tanks are located under the van protected by stone guards. Five of the tanks are for freshwater for washing, one is for drinking, and another is for grey water. Emptying the grey water tank is made easier with an extendable hose that is accessible from the side of the van – not having to crawl under the van is a win in my book. There is a tap on the drawer bar perfect for washing hands after any dirty work.

ON THE OUTSIDE

With solar panels becoming ever more efficient, there is room for 1160W to recharge even the hungriest of batteries. From a bird's eye view, you can see that the roof has been left as clear as possible to allow for a maximum number of solar panels. With this much solar recharging available, running the Truma soft start air conditioner will be more than possible off-grid on a sunny day, as the panels will put more back into the batteries than the air con draws on days like this. Now that is truly off-grid living!

There is an Oyster automatic satellite system with a Vast Box that will allow you to catch up on the State of Origin match or other essential sporting or movie event, even in the most remote outback. Two antennas sit above the door, one to catch any radio waves and the other to capture any phone signal to feed to the Cel-Fi-Go unit to boost mobile reception. There are two ventilation hatches on the roof at the rear to vent the ensuite and bunk area.

The Aussie Traveller Sunburst rollout awning provide a good amount of shade and rain protection along the length of the van. This is a particularly good quality awning with three curved rafters to ensure no pooling of water when it rains. There are also anti-flap kit to help when its windy and soft covers that protect both your head and the awning legs. The padded covers wrap around the awning legs while travelling or setup.

CLOCKWISE FROM BELOW There's room for the whole family; Plenty of prep space for dinner; It featurees a very neat and functional electrical system; You'll be comfortable in the lounge and kitchen

SAFIERY
SAFIERY

On the drawer bar at the front is a large storage box perfect for wood on top, a second fridge on a pull-out slide on one side and room for a generator for cloudy days on the other. This slide has a couple of tied down points built into the slide out tray. The attention to detail is excellent.

Moving forward from the storage box, there are two 9kg gas bottles which are plumbed into the van. Two jerry can holders sit next to these. A 10L fuel tank is securely mounted to the solid stone guard. Instead of a jockey wheel is a Cruisemaster Slide Stand. I was dubious of its inclusion until I saw it in action. When hitching the van back onto the vehicle, it was just a matter pushing the drawer bar with your leg and the slide easily slid across the grass to locate the hitch.

On the driver's side, there is a large storage hatch, a lockable filling point for each of the five water tanks and a drop-down door revealing a hot/cold outdoor shower. There are two more hatches with one being at the back of the fridge for ventilation that can be close completely to stop dust ingress and the other as access to the water heater. Toilet cassette is on the other side of the van although there is a SOG vent to drivers side.

RATINGS

VALUE FOR MONEY

★★★★★★★★☆☆

"Loads of inclusions that you didn't even think about."

TOWABILITY

★★★★★★★★☆☆

"It's heavy, but will tow well behind the right rig"

SUITABILITY FOR INTENDED TOURING

★★★★★★★★⯪☆

"Designed for off-grid, offroad touring"

BUILD QUALITY

★★★★★★★★★⯪

"Excellent attention to detail."

LIVEABILITY

★★★★★★★★★☆

"Everything you need for the family for an extended time."

SELF-SUFFICIENCY

★★★★★★★★★★

"Fitted with a pair of gas cylinders, decent solar panel capacity and grey water tank, the van is certainly good for a few days of remote travel."

CUSTOMER CARE

★★★★★★★★⯪☆

"Any repairs will be organised where ever you are"

INNOVATION

★★★★★★★★⯪☆

"Some great innovations included."

X-FACTOR

★★★★★★★★☆☆

"An excellent quality van that doesn't need to shout about it"

The left hand side is where the main entry door is located forward of the wheels in this configuration. To the right of the door are the air bag controls for levelling the van in camp. Also located here are 240V points, radio controls and tv points. To the left of the door is a slide out gas stove with a gas bayonet close by. There is also room for a BBQ on this slide-out. The large awning covers this whole area making it the main outdoor living area.

LIVING ON THE INSIDE

With plenty to like on the outside, what is it like inside? As you enter the van, the main bed (pocket spring bamboo mattress) is on the left, with storage, lights and power at the head of the bed and storage above. Straight ahead is the table and seating for four in an L-shaped leather pillow top lounge/dinette. There is even a footrest if you want to stretch out. There are loads of usb charging points as well as more 240V outlets so no-one will miss out on charging their device.

This kitchen is well appointed with range hood, microwave, Swift 3 x gas and 1 x electric cooktop. The cooktop is recessed and covered by a laminated preparation bench when the cooktop is not in use. The deep stainless steel sink has a three way mixer tap above it providing hot/cold and drinking water which are on different systems so there can be no contamination. Complimenting the kitchen is the 285L Bushman compressor fridge/freezer.

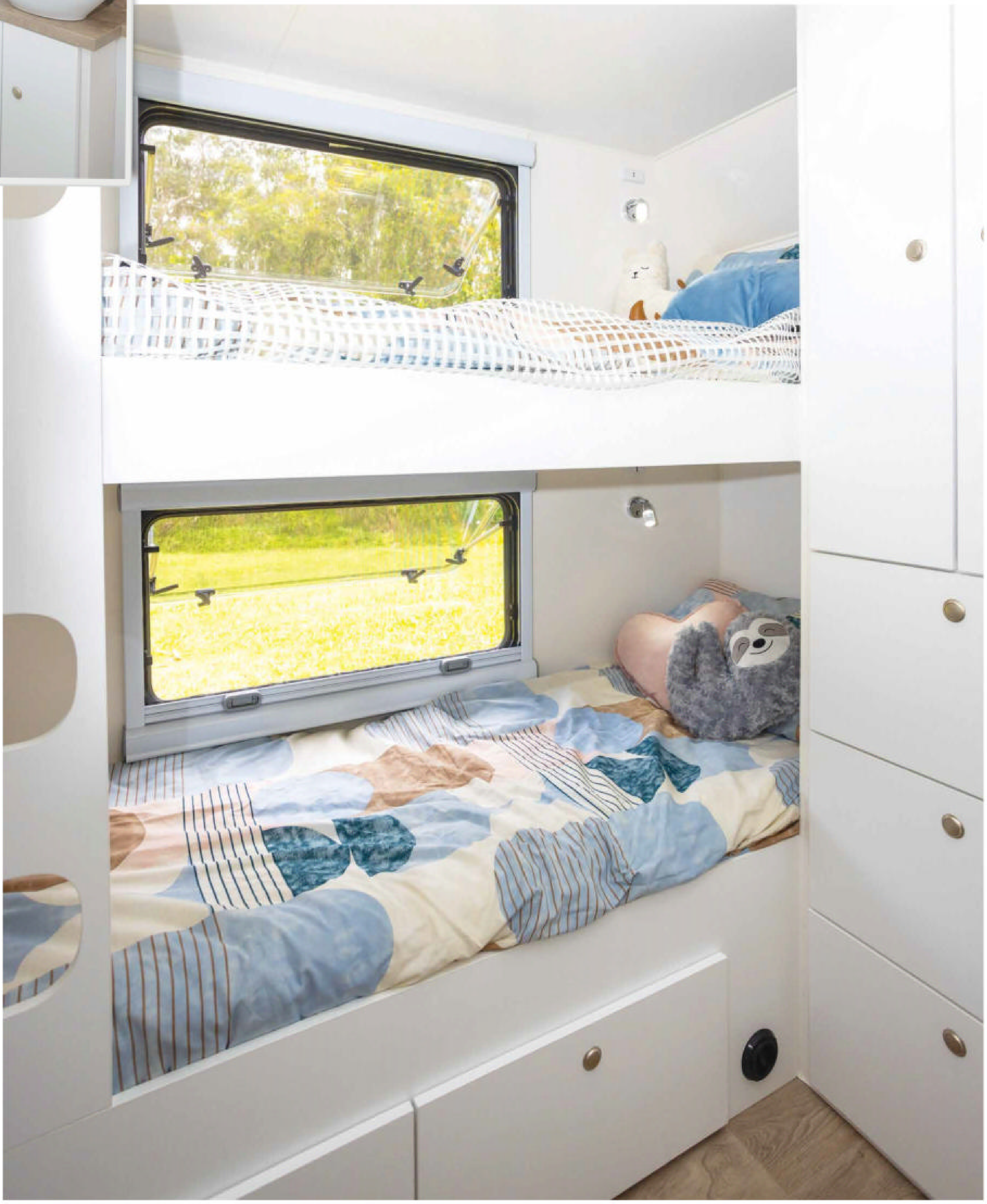
In a cupboard above the laminated benches are the controls for the radio and electrical systems. Should you ever have any problems with this, remote access via Wi-Fi can resolve any issues in real time by the staff at Spinifex in QLD. You do need to be in phone range for this to work, but is a great feature.

This van had a double bunk configuration at the rear of the van. This and the ensuite

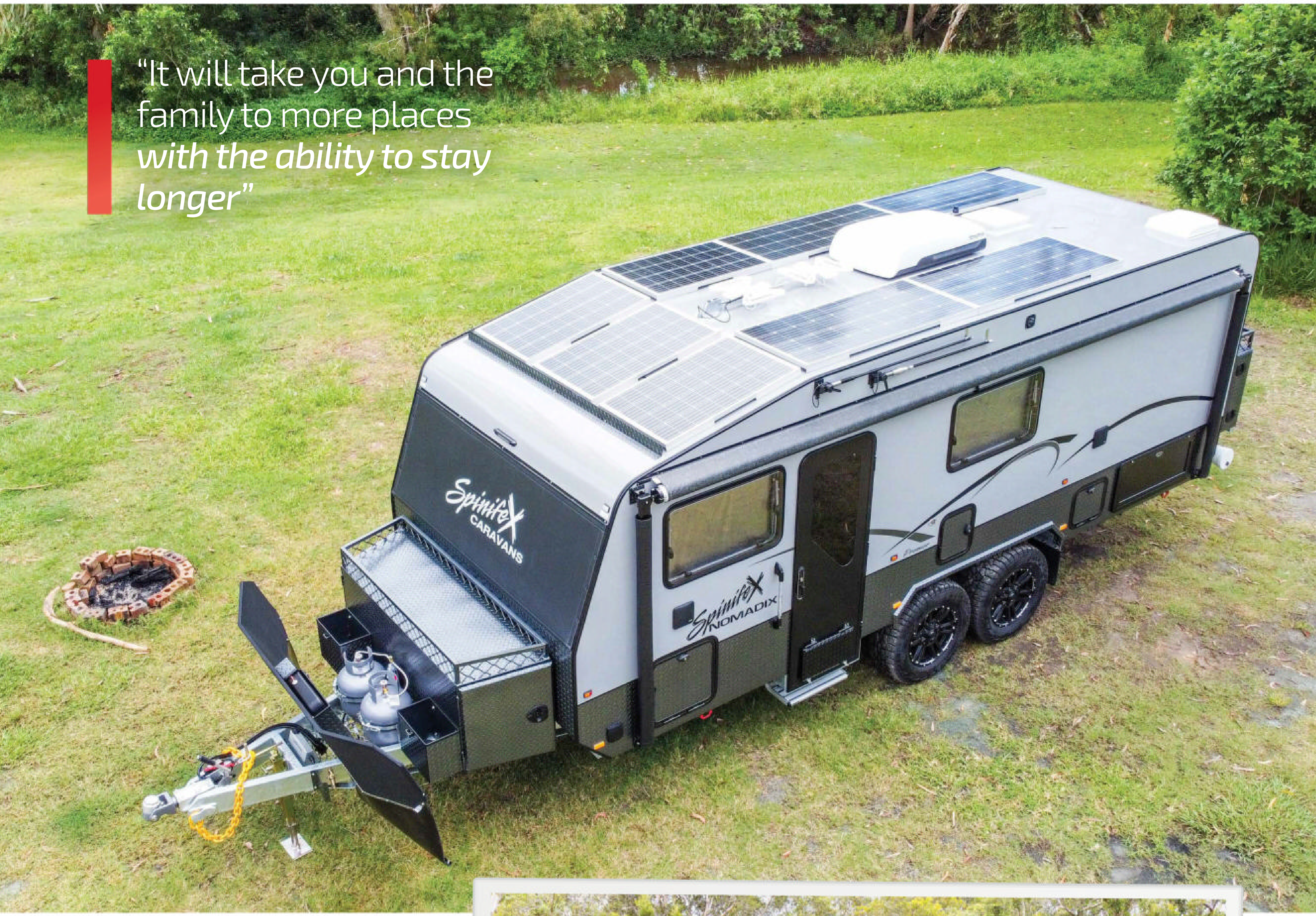
area are partitioned from the kitchen/living area using a concertina door. Each of the bunks have their own usb, fan and reading light as well as each having a window. This would certainly be very comfortable accommodation for a couple of kids. Between the bunks and the shower is a full height storage area consisting of hanging space and deep drawers perfect for clothes, toys and footballs.

The ensuite can be partitioned off from the bunk area with a curtain or concertina door. In this van, a curtain was used and seems the most functional choice. The Thetford toilet with ceramic bowel suited the area and in this van, the 3kg front loading washing machine was mounted above the toilet which freed up more space for storage. The shower had a skylight/vent above and was light and airy. The vanity basin was large with storage above and below.

The whole interior of the van had a light feeling and it would make a great home away from home on those long or short escapes.



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Double bunks with a view will keep kids happy; A privacy curtain/screen give options for the whole family; The light and bright feeling extends through into the ensuite



"It will take you and the family to more places *with the ability to stay longer*"

TOP TO BOTTOM Up top is plenty of room for solar; It has an understated external design

TOWABILITY

With an aggregate trailer mass of 4500kg, a larger towing vehicle would be required. The brakes are 12in electric/hydraulic discs which will definitely pull the van up when needed. The tow vehicle on the test day was a Toyota LandCruiser 200 Series and certainly had no problem towing the van with a tare of 3040kg.

THE BOTTOM LINE

The Spinifex NomadiX Premier is a premium caravan, and did not disappoint with its high attention to detail. The whole package was well thought out, designed well and put together to create a high quality van that will retain its value long into the future. It will take you and the family to more places with the ability to stay longer.

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Heaven sent

From saints to sipping country, sinkholes and scenic shores, SA's Limestone Coast has it all

Words and Pics **CAROLYNE JASINSKI**

CLOCKWISE FROM BELOW Kingston; Walking to the Obelisk in Robe; Penola Petticoat Lane; Saint Mary MacKillop Penola Centre in Penola

Could there be anything more heavenly than a wine region with a saintly blessing? I'm talking about the Coonawarra, known by some for premium cabernet sauvignon wine, but by others for being the home of Mary MacKillop, Australia's first and only saint. Saint Mary MacKillop lived in Penola, a tiny town in the heart of SA's Limestone Coast. It's a pretty spot with a lovely, lively community very proud of its past.

Petticoat Lane is a prime example. It's one of the prettiest streets in Penola and one of the most important. Lined with historic cottages, old English-style gardens and even petticoats hanging on old clothes lines, the Lane is a nod to Penola's history. The Heritage-listed homes are much loved by the locals – so much so that one has a thriving community vegetable garden. Volunteers make sure it's planted year-round and there's an honesty box for those who come and pick the fresh produce.

> ***"the Coonawarra, known by some for premium cabernet sauvignon wine, but by others for being the home of Mary MacKillop, Australia's first and only saint"***

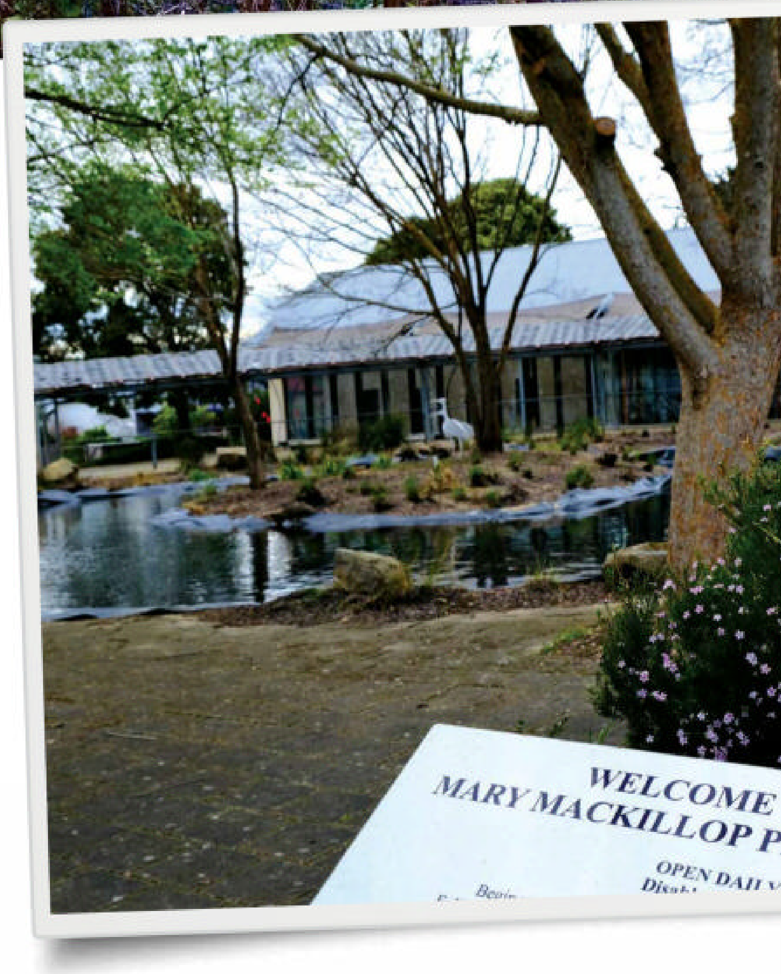
An interpretive centre next to the St Joseph's Catholic Church reveals info about Saint Mary MacKillop. While she focussed on the human spirit, looking after spirits of a different kind are the 26 cellar doors located in this special pocket of terra rossa soil. Take that rusty-coloured, free-draining topsoil, laying on an ancient limestone ridge, add an underground aquifer and a long, cool ripening season and you have the makings of a perfect wine region – the Coonawarra.

Just 25km long and 2km wide, it lies 390km from Adelaide. The drive here can be done in a loop, south through pastures and the cattle and sheep grazing heartland and back up along the coast. If you're coming from Adelaide, head through the Hills to Tailem Bend and Coonalpyn (stop for the silo art) to Keith – gateway to the South East.

Padthaway offers the first glimpse of grapevines as the Riddoch Highway cuts through the Padthaway Wine Region. It's worth stopping at Naracoorte to visit the ancient cave network at Naracoorte Caves National Park.

This 500,000-year-old, World Heritage-listed fossil hotspot has tours to four of the 28 caves and a campground if you want to stay longer. Bird lovers will want to see (and maybe stay) at Bool Lagoon where a boardwalk crosses the wetlands.

The Riddoch Highway then slices through the Coonawarra and, with cellar doors dotted along either side of the road, winery hopping is a case of coming out of one driveway and turning into the next. But to get an insider's knowledge – and avoid drink-driving – a Coonawarra Experiences tour is a much better idea (see the break-out story for all the details).



"On the way down, green fields extend to the horizon, interrupted only by cows, sheep and the odd homestead"

MT GAMBIER

On to 'The Mount', through kilometres of pine plantations and Nangwarry where the Forestry and Logging Museum shows how important the timber industry is in this neck of the woods.

Mt Gambier is where you'll get a city-style fix with all the shops, specialty stores and amenities you can think of. It also has some special attractions. The Blue Lake is the big drawcard. Come in November for the famous vivid cobalt blue hue. You can drive around the lake or walk the trails – especially if you stay at the Big 4 Blue Lake Holiday Park (big4.com.au). And don't miss the sunken garden at Umpherston Sinkhole and Cave Gardens.

Just outside of Mt Gambier are a few possible 'firsts' to try. Climb a volcano at Mt Schank – thankfully this one is 'sleeping'. It's a hike to the top – not really a 'scenic walk' like signs indicate, but the view of a crater from the last eruption is worth it. On the way down, green fields extend to the horizon, interrupted only by cows, sheep and the odd homestead.

How about swimming in a volcanic sinkhole? Located beneath one of these nearby farms, Kilsby Sinkhole is world-renowned as one of the best sinkhole dive sites due to its crystal-clear water, and Little Blue Lake (though it doesn't turn bright blue anymore) can be found close by in the middle of a paddock.

CLOCKWISE FROM BELOW Port MacDonnell; View on the way down at Mt Schank; View from the top of Mt Schank; Umpherston Sinkhole at Mt Gambier

It's not far to Piccaninnie Ponds or Ewens Ponds for more snorkelling or diving, then on to Port MacDonnell – SA's most southerly point and our 'southern rock lobster capital.' The Maritime Museum details this historic port's past and the resident fishing fleet keeps local fish and chip shops busy. Poet, Adam Lindsay Gordon, once lived in Port MacDonnell – check out his home at Dingley Dell.

From here, sealed roads lead to coastal spots like Cape Douglas, Nene Valley, Blackfellows Caves, Pelican Point and Carpenter Rocks, where you might see the cray fleet anchored in Bucks Bay. Pack fishing rods because the locals swear you'll catch whiting, garfish, mulloway and salmon from the Cape Banks Lighthouse area. It's a 30-minute drive back to Mt Gambier.

The Waterfront

HEADING NORTH

Today, the Limestone Coast loop turns north again through Tantanoola, where you can stop to see another limestone cave, and Millicent, the commercial hub for surrounding farming and timber industries.

Detour to Southend to see the start of Rivoli Bay. This is also the gateway to coastal Canunda National Park. Book at parks.sa.gov.au if you want to camp. Then see Rivoli Bay from the other end on Beachport's 772m jetty – SA's second longest after Pt Germein. After the heavenly inspiration back in Penola, here's your chance to try walking on water at the Pool of Siloam. The water is seven times saltier than the ocean. You'll find it on Beachport's stunning Bowman Scenic Drive.

ROBE

Next stop is chic Robe – one of SA's most popular beach destinations known for its long white-sand beach (funnily enough, called Long Beach), crayfish, cosmopolitan cafes, hip pubs and funky homeware shops. It's also home to Robe Town Brewery and Mahalia Coffee.

Walking is the best way to get around the tourist highlights. The Obelisk Coastal Trail passes Robe's old gaol ruins, jetty and marina to the Obelisk – built to help ships navigate Guichen Bay. The path stops short of the Obelisk thanks to cliff erosion.

Discovery Park, with direct access to the beach, is a great place to unhitch the van (discoveryholidayparks.com.au).

CAPE JAFFA

If the name Cape Jaffa sounds familiar, it might be the wine connection. Cellar doors like Cape Jaffa Wines and Ralph Fowler line the road into the Cape Jaffa Anchorage. At the end of the road is a stunning marina with huge boats and houses to match.

KINGSTON SE

Kingston SE feels like a quiet, hidden gem. But perhaps it's not so hidden, though, as there are three places to stay: Maria Creek and Pinks Beach RV parks at opposite ends of town (with on-site pay stations) and Kingston Foreshore Caravan Park, next to Cape Jaffa Lighthouse (kingstonforeshorecaravanpark.com.au)

A 7km coastal drive and walkway stretches along the shore. Larry the giant Lobster lives here – though I managed to miss him somehow. There's also a boat ramp but it closes seasonally so check ahead before bringing the dinghy.

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT Mahalia Coffee at Robe; View from Caravan Park on Esplanade in Kingston; Penola Petticoat Lane; The Pool of Siloem in Beachport; The coastal walking trail in Robe; Beach access from Discovery Park in Robe

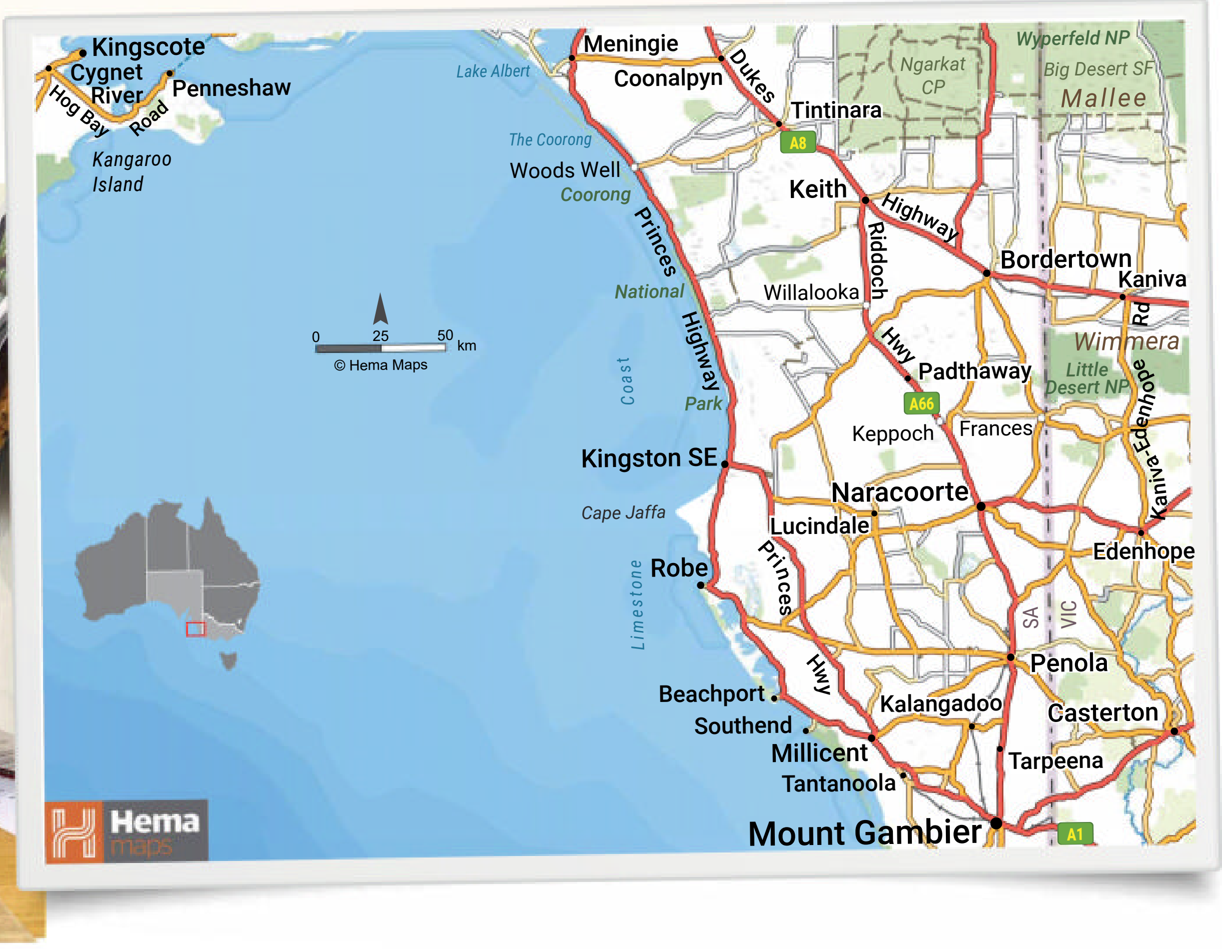
A TASTE OF COONAWARRA

"We can thank John Riddoch for the Coonawarra," says Simon Meares from Coonawarra Experiences. I am touring this wine region with Simon, and it all starts with a history lesson.

According to Simon, the gold rush brought the pioneering Scotsman to Australia, but Riddoch found his own 'gold' in the terra rossa soil. From setting up a fruit colony to creating a wine region, Riddoch's legacy was cemented when Chateau Comaum was built in 1891. Known as The Gables, it's now Wynns Coonawarra Estate.

Ten wineries in two days is a big call but here's a summary of what we discover.

- Bellwether Wines cellar door started as a shearing shed, built in 1857 by Chinese migrants on their way to the Victorian gold fields. Sue Bell turned the property into a winery in 2009. Sue's Ant wine series is a standout, made from small special parcels of fruit from far and wide. The Bellwether campground is my home for a few nights.
- Winemaker Lewis White gives us the private tour at Rymill, blending our own classic cabernet in the lab and sampling straight from barrels. "Coonawarra is perfect for cabernet but the cool climate is also suits sparkling wines, chardonnay and aromatic whites like sauvignon blanc and gewurztraminer," Lewis says as we sample the lot.
- Nick Zema's family has come a long way since buying eight acres, a tin shed and half a house to start Zema Estate in 1982. "We now have a winery and cellar door and a whole house," Nick laughs. The barrel room tasting starts with sauvignon blanc, rose and a surprise package — a sparkling merlot. Then it's on to the best-selling cabernet and shiraz.
- The focus at Patrick of Coonawarra has always been on cab sav and Riesling, until 2013 when Luke Tocaciu took the reins and added new styles like the Methode range. There's Skinny Riesling, fermented on skins to build texture; Cab Nouveau, a soft, lighter version of a typical cab sav, and the 'unusual' Eucalypt Cabernet Sauvignon.
- Di Giorgio Family Wines offers Italian heritage and a tasting paddle with a sparkling, Riesling, rose, cab franc, shiraz and ever-dominant cab sav. But Di Giorgio is all about what you do when drinking wine. You can make your own picnic platters, join a pasta-making class or walk through the pit to see the terra rossa up close.
- The Brand's Laira story starts in 1950 when Eric and Nancy Brand bought 24ha of land that had been planted with shiraz grapes in 1893 by English sea captain, Henry Stentiford. Eric's private cellar — an old fruit drying shed full of old bottles, dust and all — is ideal for lunch and wine ranging from a Germanic-style Riesling to that sumptuous Stentiford Shiraz.
- It would be a 'Syn' not to taste the signature sparkling chardonnay pinot noir, shiraz and rose at Leconfield — the Coonawarra arm of Richard Hamilton Wines. The line-up from winemakers Paul Gordon and Greg Foster also includes Riesling and softer Bordeaux-style blends of cab franc, merlot and cab sav.
- Whistle Post is the Coonawarra's newest cellar door and Angus Smibert is the new kid on the block when it comes to winemaking. His family, however, has been growing grapes since buying the V&A Lane Vineyard in 2007. The name reflects the huge role the railway played in the developing the region's wine industry.
- With names like The Kid Riesling and Wild Goat Shiraz, it's impossible to ignore the goat connection at Steven and Emma's Raidis Estate. "We run goats among the vines, after picking," Emma says. "They clean up excess grapes, reduce disease pressure and get rid of weeds," she added. "It's part of our pesticide-free, vegan-friendly viticulture process." For the record, the (delicious) Cheeky Goat Pino Gris is their best seller — no kidding (coonawarraexperiences.com.au).


Kingscote
Cygnet River
Hog Bay Road
Penneshaw
Kangaroo Island
Lake Albert
Meningie
Coonalpyn
Dukes
Tintinara
A8
Ngarkat CP
Wyperfeld NP
Big Desert SF
Mallee
The Coorong
Woods Well
Coorong
Keith
Highway
Riddoch
Hwy
Princes
National
Highway
Park
Coast
Willalooka
Bordertown
Kaniva
Wimmera
Little Desert NP
Padthaway
A66
Keppoch
Frances
Kaniva-Edenhope Rd
Kingston SE
Naracoorte
Cape Jaffa
Lucindale
Edenhope
Robe
Limestone
Princes Hwy
SA
VIC
Penola
Beachport
Southend
Kalangadoo
Casterton
Millicent
Tarpeena
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BELLWETHER Wines

CLOCKWISE FROM BELOW Simon and Kerry Meares at Brand's Laira in Coonawarra; Di Giorgio Wines pit showing terra rossa soil in Coonawarra; Carolyne Jasinski wine tasting at Di Giorgio; Bellwether Wines in Coonawarra

COORONG

The Coorong National Park lines the highway north towards Meningie. The scenery is a mix of thick vegetation and open waterways with a few places to stop and rest and turnoffs along dirt roads into the national park.

Signs show camp spots along the way at 28 Mile Crossing, 42 Mile Crossing, Tea Tree Crossing, Salt Creek and Magrath Flat past Policeman's Point. Salt Creek was a favourite place to stop and shop, refuel, rest and pick up Coorong mullet, but it's now closed. If you're lucky, the roadside pop-up van selling fresh fish might be open.

TOP TO BOTTOM Penola Petticoat Lane; Pelicans on Lake Albert in Meningie

TRADITIONAL OWNERS

The Traditional Owners of the Limestone Coast in South Australia are the Ngarrindjeri and Booandik people, with six distinct language groups found in the region. We pay respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

MENINGIE

On to Meningie on the shores of Lake Albert, and our loop is almost complete. Picture pelicans gracefully sliding on to still waters. It's a beautiful town to stay and soak up the tranquillity. Lake Albert Caravan Park is one of the lakeside holiday parks – right next to the Cheese Factory Museum and Freshies Cafe.

It's only 150km back to Adelaide – unless you turn left at Tailem Bend, skirt around Lake Alexandrina and through Milang to Goolwa. The Fleurieu Peninsula is full of more adventures and you can take a Spirit of the Coorong cruise along the wildlife-rich waterway you have just passed.

> *"The Fleurieu Peninsula is full of more adventures and you can take a Spirit of the Coorong cruise along the wildlife-rich waterway you have just passed"*

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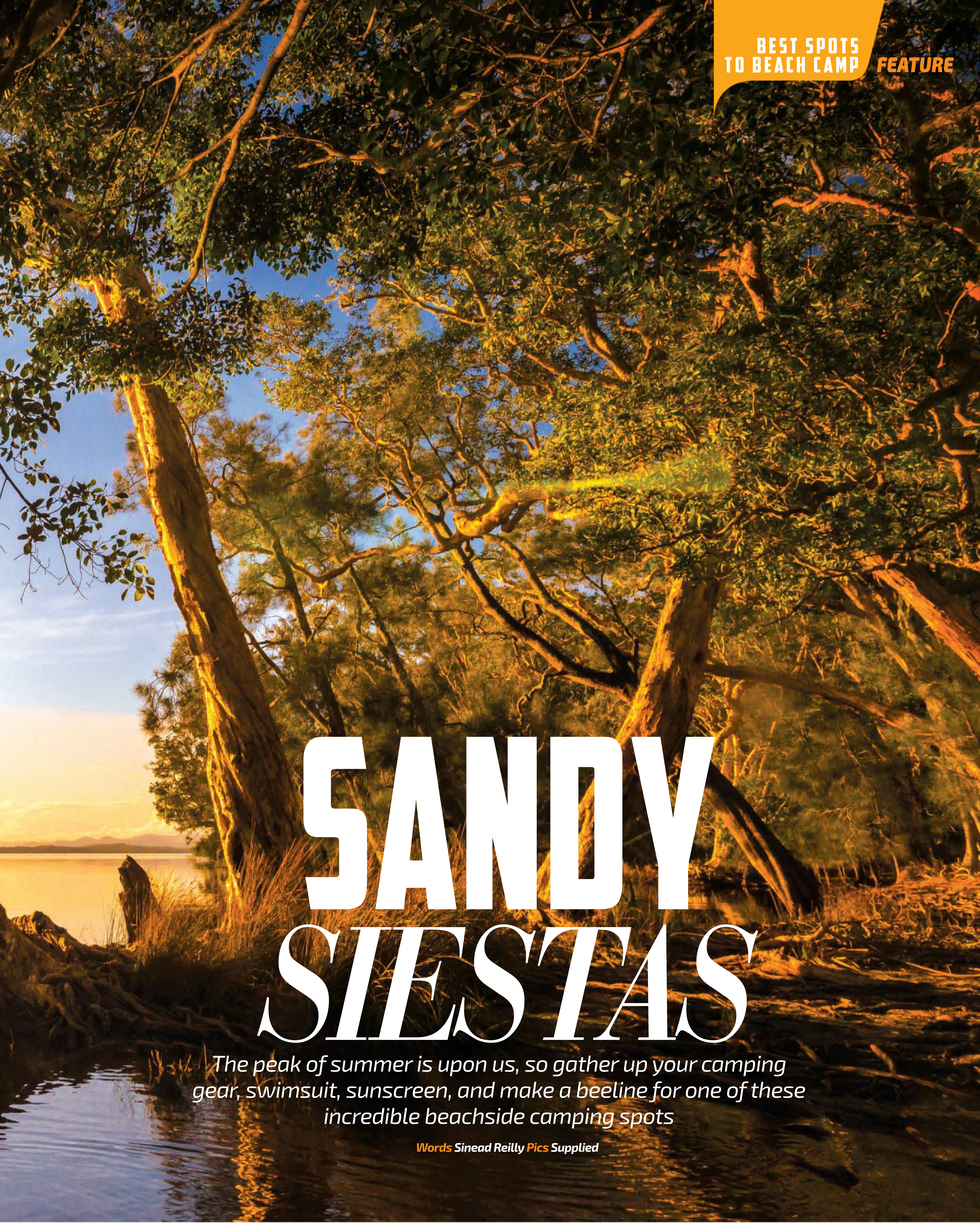
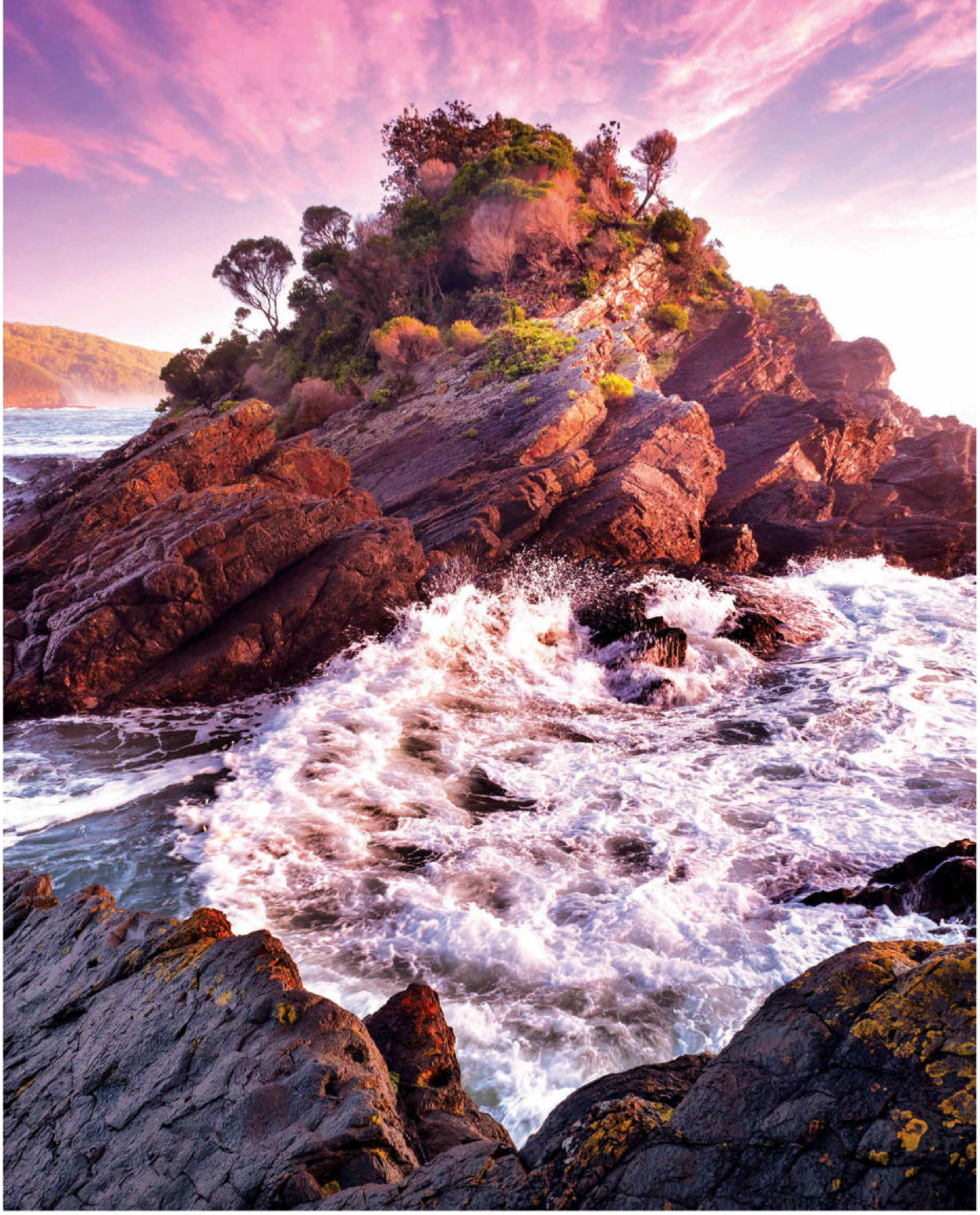
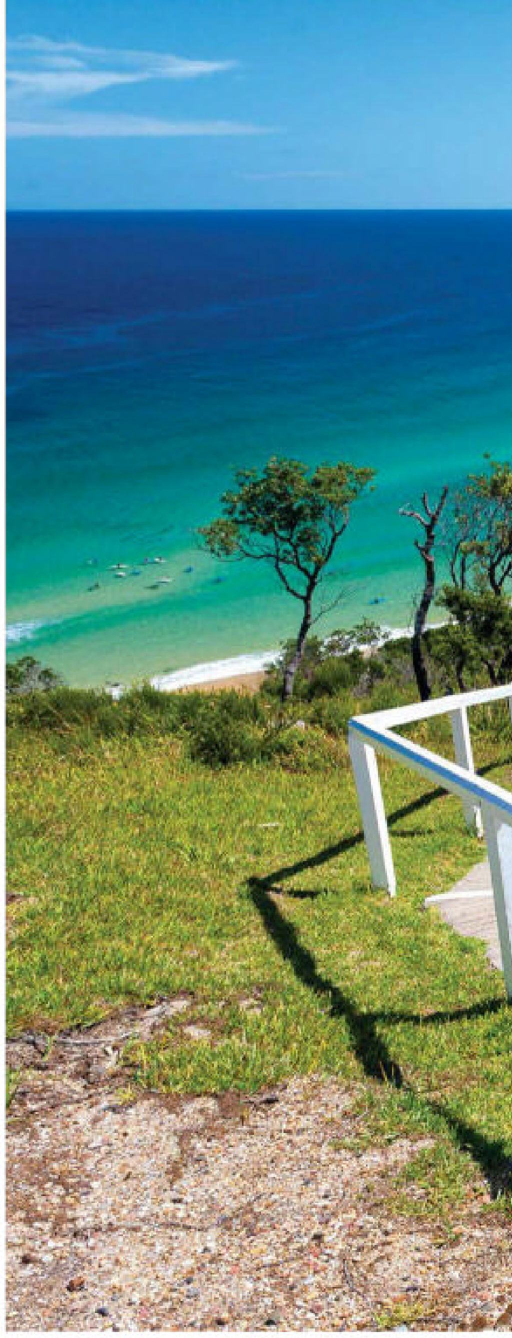


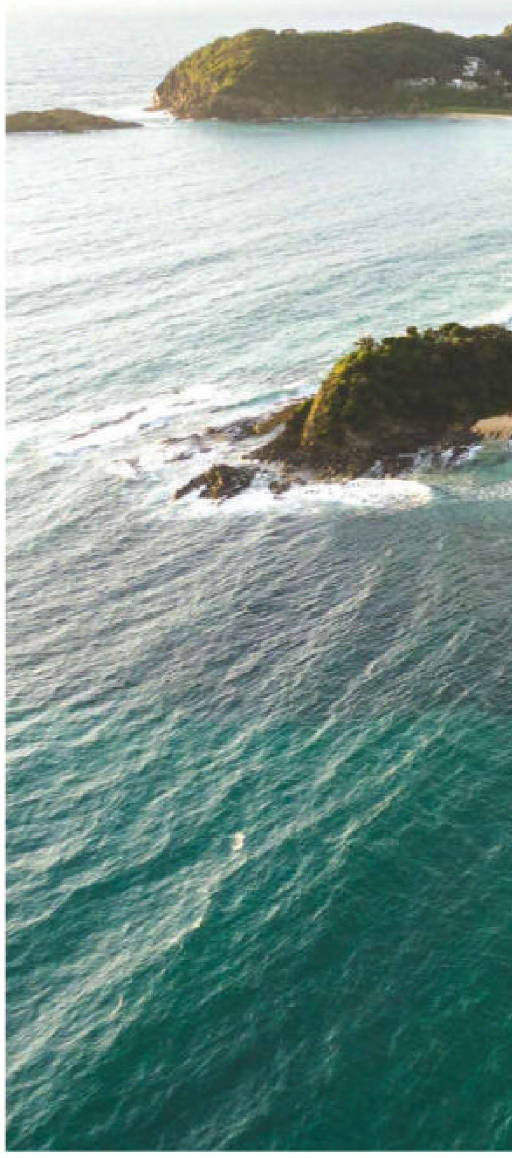
SANDY SIESTAS

The peak of summer is upon us, so gather up your camping gear, swimsuit, sunscreen, and make a beeline for one of these incredible beachside camping spots

Words Sinead Reilly **Pics** Supplied





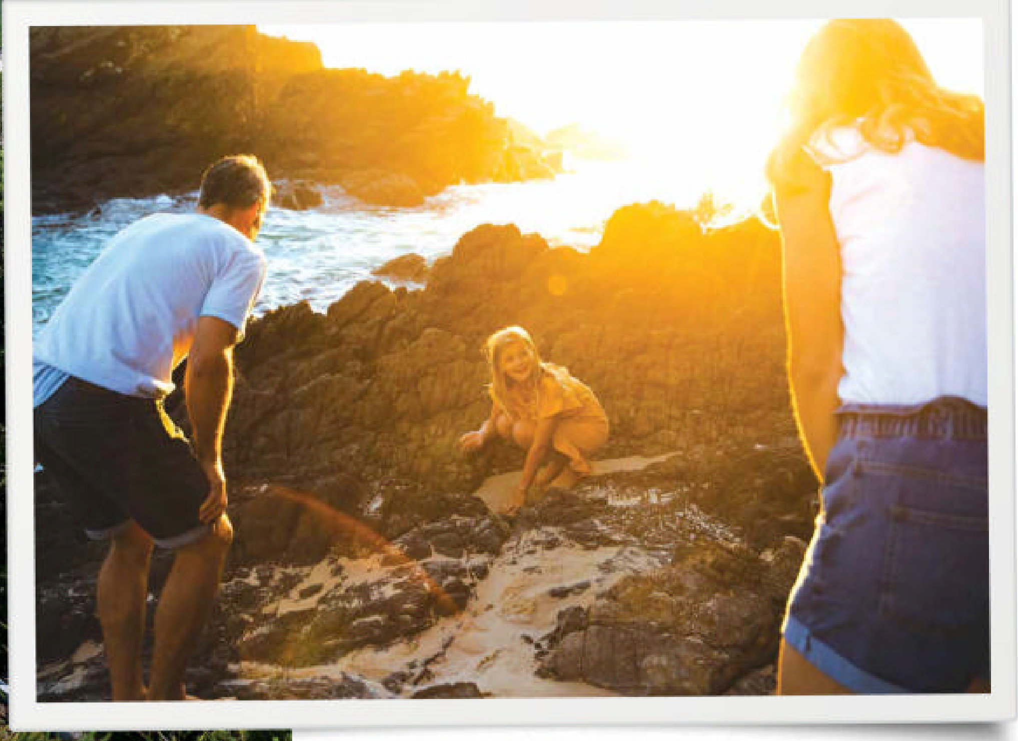


FROM LEFT Seal Rocks have views in spades at sunset; Beach access is simple. Image: Destination NSW; Families can make the most of the sunny days here. Image: Destination NSW; Pristine coast and surf breaks come together here. Image: Destination NSW

In my mind, summer days spent by the ocean are a cure-all for everything, every time. Tensions and pressures melt away under the heat of the sun as easily as butter, and the hours of the day become elongated, unfettered by the demands of regular obligations. There is a singular sense of gratification tied to lying on a beach for hours on end, growing gradually greasier throughout the day from habitual sunscreen reapplication, with miniscule white crystals of salt accumulating on limbs and eyelashes both. Concerns are limited to the heat, and the answer to that is always another swim. Repeat as needed. Break up the days spent lying on the sand with bushwalks, which will deplete your energy so that you're ready for another few days of constant repose. Whatever the case, parents undoubtedly find delight in watching their kids collapse into bed at the end of the day, glazed in sand and docile from heat-induced fatigue.

This summer ritual is not exclusive to Australia – think coastal European cities, south-east Asia, west coast USA, and so on. Add camping to the mix, though, and it becomes a uniquely Australian pastime, one that has hummed away quietly in the background for decades, while other holidaymaking trends have passed through a constantly revolving door.

The presence of beachside camping in the arsenal of favourite Australian holiday activities is solid for many excellent reasons: it's budget-friendly, perfect for going solo or with a crew, and it drops you right on the shared doorstep of the ocean and the bush. Regardless of which state you're in, surfside campgrounds are generally a dime a dozen, but which spots are the cream of the crop?



SEAL ROCKS, NEW SOUTH WALES

A three-hour drive north of Sydney or just under two hours from Newcastle, Seal Rocks is a tiny village on the Barrington Coast. Prized for its pristine coastline with excellent surf breaks, choose a campground and spend time swimming, surfing, fishing, and exploring the seemingly endless stretches of beaches.

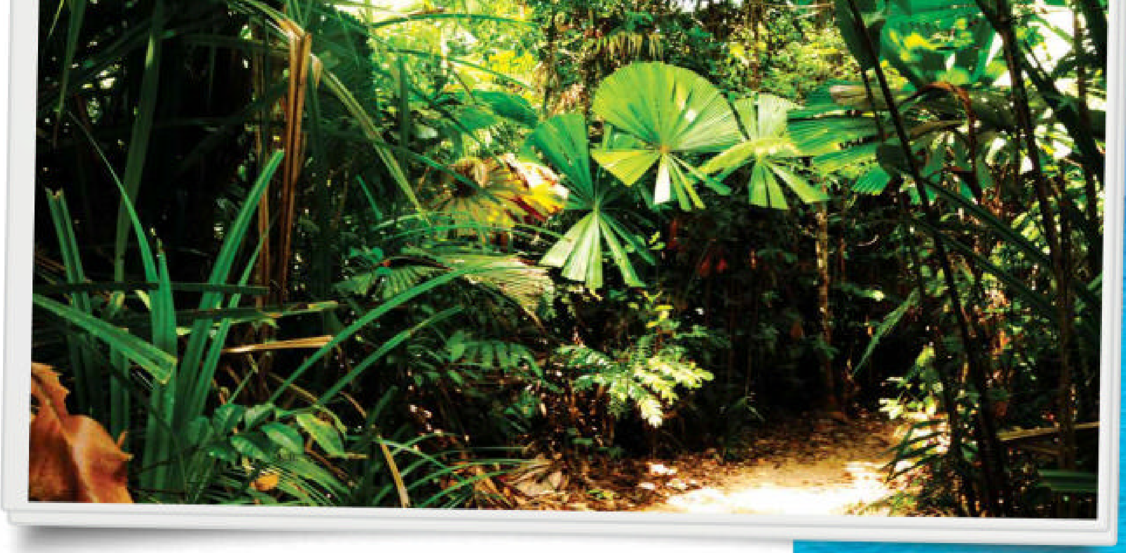
Myall Lakes National Park is right on the doorstep and offers excellent birdwatching and hiking opportunities. Treachery Headland Track is a short walk that takes in scenic views of Sugarloaf Point Lighthouse – take a detour to beautiful Treachery Beach and cool off en route. For a much longer and relatively more difficult walk, opt for Mungo Walking Track, a 21km (one way) trail that passes through some important Indigenous sites as well as some diverse flora before finishing up at Hawks Nest.

Wallingat National Park is also super close by and can be reached in half an hour. Here, check out the two short and beautiful walks, Coachwood Loop and Cabbage Palm Loop, both of which will lead you into thickets of sky-high native cabbage palms and blue gums. The best thing about Wallingat is that it tends to fly under the radar, so if you arrive early, you're very likely to have the place almost to yourself. Find the Wallingat River and take the opportunity to have a swim in between walks, and then head to Whoota Whoota Lookout, which provides a stunning view over the surrounding coastline at sunset.

Stay at the family-owned Treachery Camp, which has plenty of unpowered sites a stone's throw from the beach and welcomes all types of rigs. Treachery Camp has coin-operated washers/dryers, allows small campfires subject to fire bans, and sells firewood, ice, and LPG gas.

Tip: Head over to Lighthouse Beach and join a camel ride along the shoreline, no bookings required. Cash only.

Book at:
Ph: (02) 4997 6138
W: treacherycamp.com.au



MISSION BEACH, QUEENSLAND

Situated on the Cassowary Coast between Townsville and Cairns – three hours north of the former, or two hours south of the latter – the shores of Mission Beach are laced with palm trees. 'Tropical haven' is a term that gets thrown around a lot, but Mission Beach embodies it to a tee.

Aside from the crystal-clear waters of the coastline, it's also the most ideal place to set up base camp and spend some time exploring the Great Barrier Reef, being the closest mainland access point – it's less than 40km offshore. This means plenty of tours are run from this spot (check out missionbeachtourism.com/things-to-do-mission-beach-old/great-barrier-reef-tours-mission-beach/). The Great Barrier Reef needs no introduction, much less any touting, but whether you want to explore the world's largest and oldest reef system via snorkelling, diving, or flying over the sheets of endless teal in a helicopter, Mission Beach is the place to start.

On the other side it's flanked by Wet Tropics Rainforest – home to a staggering 663 species of vertebrate animals, 230 butterfly species, 135 beetle species, and 222 species of land snails – plus a wealth of rainforest hikes and walks to break up the days spent lying on the sand.

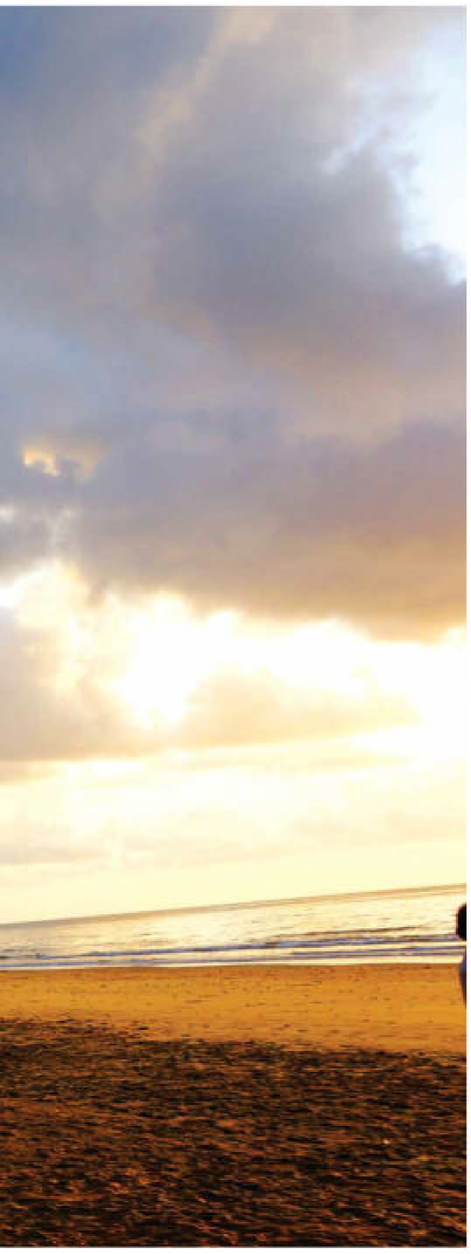
Stay at Mission Beach Camping & Caravan Park, which has full beach frontage and offers both powered and unpowered sites for all types of rigs. It's also pet-friendly, and there's even free Wi-Fi (though checking emails will likely be the furthest thing from your mind). If you want to feel even more remote, the Family Group of Islands lie just off the coast of Mission Beach, and if you charter a boat or hop aboard a water taxi you can get to the camping areas on Coombe and Wheeler Islands, which are accessible via boat only. Only one group of eight people at a time can camp on the southern side of Coombe Island, while the camping area on Wheeler Island can accommodate 10 people at a time. If you do opt to go here, you'll have to take all the essentials with you. Open fires are strictly prohibited.

The only drawback of Mission Beach and the surrounding islands lies in the danger of stingers (including box jellyfish) from October to June – during this time, it's highly recommended to swim only within areas that are safely netted.

Book at:

Ph: (07) 4210 6078

W: missionbeachcampingandcaravanpark.com.au



> “Just over two hours from Geelong, Blanket Bay is ensconced *among manna gum forest on the east coast of Cape Otway.*”

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT Tropical paradise is an accurate assessment of Mission Beach; Not far inland and you're amongst Australia's tropics; Take a look under the surface; Blanket Bay combines the best of coastal and inland exploration

BLANKET BAY, VICTORIA

If you feel like cooling off amid lush temperate rainforest between days spent swimming and snorkelling, Blanket Bay is an excellent option. A three-hour drive from Melbourne or just over two hours from Geelong, Blanket Bay is ensconced among manna gum forest on the east coast of Cape Otway.

Switch between exploring either the beautifully rugged coastline or the stunning Great Otway National Park. From Blanket Bay, a slew of beautiful waterfalls – including Hopetoun Falls, Little Aire Falls, and Erskine Falls – can be reached within an hour or so, as can a list of walks and hikes as long as one’s arm. Some good ones to try out are Phantom Falls, or the longer ironbark-laden Currawong Falls Walk. It’s generally recommended to wear hiking boots for these ones, as the tracks can become very muddy and slippery due to rain.

Set up your Otways base at Blanket Bay Campground, but you’ll need to book your stay quite far in advance, as this hideaway is sought-after for good reason. Over the summer, Easter, and certain public holidays, bookings are allotted via a ballot-type system. Even so, the isolated campground is comprised of just 22 sites that can accommodate a maximum of six people each – meaning it retains its sense of isolated serenity and never feels overrun. Camper trailers, motorhomes, campervans, and caravans are all welcome, though some sites are larger than others, so when booking it’s recommended to check out the dimensions of the available sites and make a comparison with the size of your setup. There are communal fireplaces and picnic tables on site, and all campsites are unpowered.

Book at:

Ph: 13 19 63 (Parks Victoria)

W: parks.vic.gov.au/bookings/place/blanket-bay-campground

owdy Bay
ional Park

DIAMOND HEAD, NEW SOUTH WALES

Diamond Head in Crowdy Bay National Park lies a five-hour drive north of Sydney, or a forty-five-minute drive south from Port Macquarie.

Don't be waylaid by Crowdy Bay's name, as the beaches around here rarely reach the point of being crowded. Its namesake instead lies in the quartz crystals in its cliffs. There's an abundance of native fauna to keep an eye out for – including a famous crew of kangaroos that hang out by the water, koalas, and plenty of birdlife to spot – gorgeous swimming spots, and plenty of bushwalks situated amid pockets of rainforest, coastal heath, and extensive wetlands. Diamond Head Loop Walk is a medium difficulty walk that will take you through forests of paperbark and swamp mahogany, up through the headland to Kylie's lookout (keep an eye out for dolphins), where you'll have a panoramic view of Crowdy Bay with the Three Brothers Mountains looming behind you.

There's also plenty of opportunities to fish and explore countless rockpools at low tide. 4WD beach permits can be purchased from Mid Coast Council (midcoast.nsw.gov.au/Recreation/Beaches/Driving-on-Beaches).

Stay at the beachside Diamond Head Campground, which has sites for caravans, camper trailers, campervans, and motorhomes. Stock up on food and supplies in Laurieton, which is 10km from Diamond Head. Fire braziers can be hired at the campground, and firewood can be purchased on site.

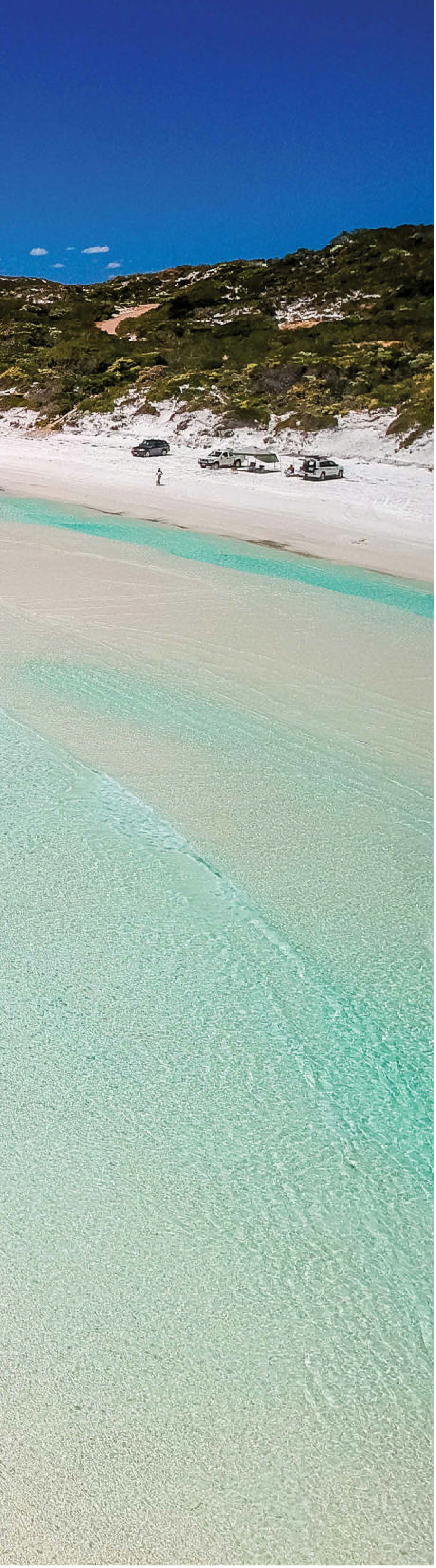
Book at:

Ph: 1300 072 757 (National Parks Contact Centre)

W: nationalparks.nsw.gov.au/camping-and-accommodation/campgrounds/diamond-head-campground

Crowdy Bay
National Park
4WD Beach Access Track
10km/h
NO PARKING on the beach access track.
Diamond Head Walk in Camp
10 min 'Loading Zone' for walk in campers only. NO PARKING on the beach access track.
Caution - this is a high use pedestrian area. NO PARKING in the southern corner of Diamond Head / Dunbogan Beach.
Beach drivers must hold and display a beach driving permit at all times.
No fires
No camping
Beware high surf
Strong currents

FROM LEFT
Locals taking in the scenes at Diamond Head. Image: Destination NSW; You'll feel like you have the place to yourself. Image: Destination NSW; Hit the waves early in the morning. Image: Destination NSW



FROM LEFT These kind of colours aren't seen really anywhere else. Image: Tourism WA; Access is quick and easy. Image: Tourism WA

> “It's no secret that the entirety of Cape Le Grand has spectacularly *white sands contrasted by unbelievably blue waters”*

LUCKY BAY, CAPE LE GRAND NATIONAL PARK, WESTERN AUSTRALIA

If you’re already based in Esperance, you’re fortunately only just under an hour away from Lucky Bay in Cape Le Grand National Park. If you’re in Perth, though, you’re about eight-and-a-half hours away, but this spot is inarguably worth it – it’s no secret that the entirety of Cape Le Grand has spectacularly white sands contrasted by unbelievably blue waters, soaring granite peaks, and showcases much of the south-west region’s native flora and fauna.

With Thistle Cove, Le Grand Beach, Hellfire Bay, and Rossiter Bay to explore, there’s no shortage of surreal beaches where you can occupy yourself diving into pristine water, snorkelling, canoeing, and kayaking. As you make your way through the park, keep a keen eye out for western grey kangaroos, pygmy possums, ringtail possums, southern brown bandicoot, all of which call Cape Le Grand home. In the second half of the year, whales can often be seen migrating along the south-west coastline, and any of the aforementioned beaches will give you a chance to spot one.

Keep in mind that the beaches in Cape Le Grand can pose difficulties to vehicles dependent on the conditions, as it can be easy to get bogged even in innocuous-looking sand. WA Parks and Wildlife Service recommends making an enquiry about the surface conditions and tides to the rangers before you enter the park.

Stay at the oceanfront Lucky Bay Campground, which is accessible to 2WD vehicles and has 25 sites that can accommodate caravans, camper trailers, and campervans. Campfires and solid fuel appliances are not permitted, although there are barbecues and picnic tables. In addition to camping fees, park entry fees also apply. Bookings are essential.

Book at:

W: parks.dpaw.wa.gov.au/site/lucky-bay

SLIDE-OUT JEWEL

Words and Pics

MALCOLM STREET

After a few delays, Malcolm Street finally puts the Avida Topaz C7652SL through its paces

AVIDA
AVIDA
TOPAZ
TOPAZ
DOMETIC

IN BRIEF

- 7.65m (25ft) tandem axle van
- Cruisemaster CRS suspension fitted
- 3.74m (12ft 3in) slide-out
- Front club lounge/ rear bathroom layout

In the Australian RV industry, particularly the caravan sector, slide-outs are something of a dilemma. There's no doubt that they add interior space to any layout, but they also add weight, extra electrics and moving parts – something of a consideration in contemporary vans.

It was with those dynamic thoughts in mind that I approached my review of Avida's slide-out fitted Topaz C7652SL tandem axle caravan. This review has been some while in the making because of delay's caused mostly by COVID-19 lockdowns.

Consequently, when the van, along with a brand new Toyota LandCruiser 300 Sahara tow vehicle, became available from Clintons RV, aka Avida Sydney, I made haste to get the tow vehicle keys in my hot little hand. Not only was I interested in the van, but I had yet to get a test drive of the new LandCruiser and I was curious to see how it compared to the much-loved 4.5L V8 turbodiesel 200 Series, a subject that has been much discussed in the towing fraternity.

MEASURING UP

PROS

- Front club lounge
- Large kitchen area
- External storage capacity
- Long slide-out

CONS

- Hot water switch location
- BMS awkward to get at
- Under chassis mounted spare wheel

AVIDA
TOPA
FPV·01B

CLOCKWISE FROM BELOW The van comes loaded with two 9kg gas bottles; A slide-out is used effectively to create space when set up; It tracked well behind the new Sahara on review day; The A-frame is sparse and pared back; There is plenty of storage for the battery boxes

AVIDA
TOPAZ

> "With windows all round, it's a great place ***to relax and watch the world go by outside***"

LAYOUT

When looking over any slide-out layout, to me it's important that the extra space created by the slide-out is used effectively. I've seen one or two layouts in both caravans and motorhomes that caused me to wonder why a slide-out was used at all. No such problems here.

The 7.65m (25ft) van has a 3.74m (12ft 3in) slide-out and it's been designed with a front club lounge, full width rear bathroom, a kitchen area that's partly on the nearside wall and partly in the front area of the slide-out. That leaves the mid rear area for an east-west island bed with the bed head in the slide-out and a nearside wall area full of cupboard space.

Those of us used to slide-out operation might be familiar with the 'Slide-in' and 'Slide-out' switches usually found somewhere around the habitation door area. Not here, at least not in the traditional fashion. Fortunately for me, Mike Hollister from the Sydney Avida team pointed out that the slide-out controls were to be found in the BMPRO touch panel above the doorway, along with a host of other digital switches and electrical readouts for the van. All the main controls are centrally located.

CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT The kitchen comes equipped with a four-burner stove; There are handy reading lights on both sides of the bed; The lounge has windows all around for a bright and airy feel

AVIDA TOPAZ

C7652SL

WEIGHTS AND MEASURES

Body length 7.63m (25ft)
Overall length 8.82m (28ft 11in)
Width 2.5m (8ft 2in)
Height 3.02m (9ft 11in)
Tare 2834kg
ATM 3500kg
Payload 666kg
Ball weight 272kg

EXTERNAL

Frame Composite
Cladding Fibreglass composite sandwich panel
Chassis Hot dipped galvanized 150mm x 50mm (6in x 2in)
Suspension Cruisemaster CRS coil springs, dual shock absorbers
Coupling Cruisemaster DO35
Brakes AL-KO 12in
Wheels 15in alloy
Water 125L
Grey Water 125L
Battery 2 x 100Ah
Solar 1 x 160W
Air-conditioner Dometic
Gas 2 x 9kg
Sway control AL-KO ESC

INTERNAL

Cooking Dometic 4 burner & grill
Fridge Thetford N614E 188L three way
Bathroom Thetford cassette toilet & separate shower cubicle.
Hot water Truma 14L

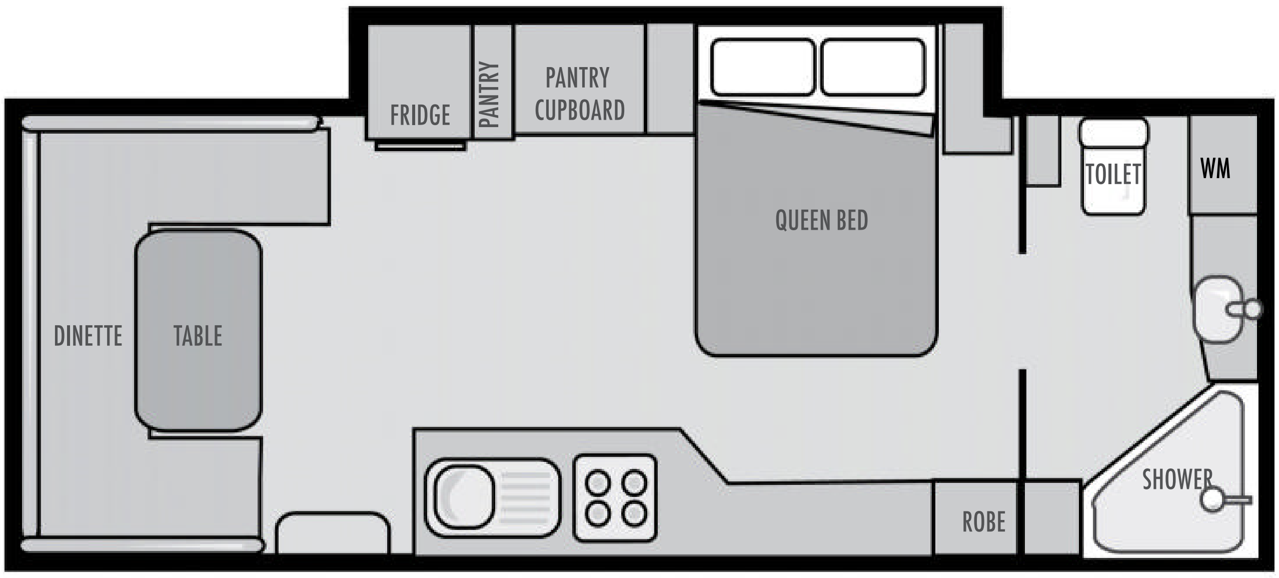
OPTIONS FITTED

- Leather upholstery
- Second 100Ah battery

PRICE AS SHOWN $121,500

MORE INFORMATION

Avida Sydney
29 Blaxland Road
Campbelltown NSW 2560
Ph: 0438 544 509
Web: avidasydney.com.au



REAR AMENITIES

What the bathroom at the rear of the Topaz offers is room to move around. It's a full width arrangement with an offside cassette toilet, a vanity cabinet that runs across the rear wall and a nearside shower cubicle. It has a door opening wide enough to get in and out with ease and room to turn around within. Even though there's a top loading washing machine in the rear offside corner, there's a decent amount of elbow space around the Thetford cassette toilet.

Fitted into the vanity cabinet is a pedestal wash basin, two door cupboard and a large wall mirror. Two overhead lockers with shelves occupy the air space above the loo, so there's no shortage of bathroom storage space. Bathroom ventilation is supplied by a window above the loo and a fan hatch above the shower. In a confined space like the bathroom, I'd prefer two exhaust fans.

It's not a major item but for quick roadside stops, it's not possible to get to the bathroom with the slide-out fully closed up, it does have to be partially opened.

BY NIGHT

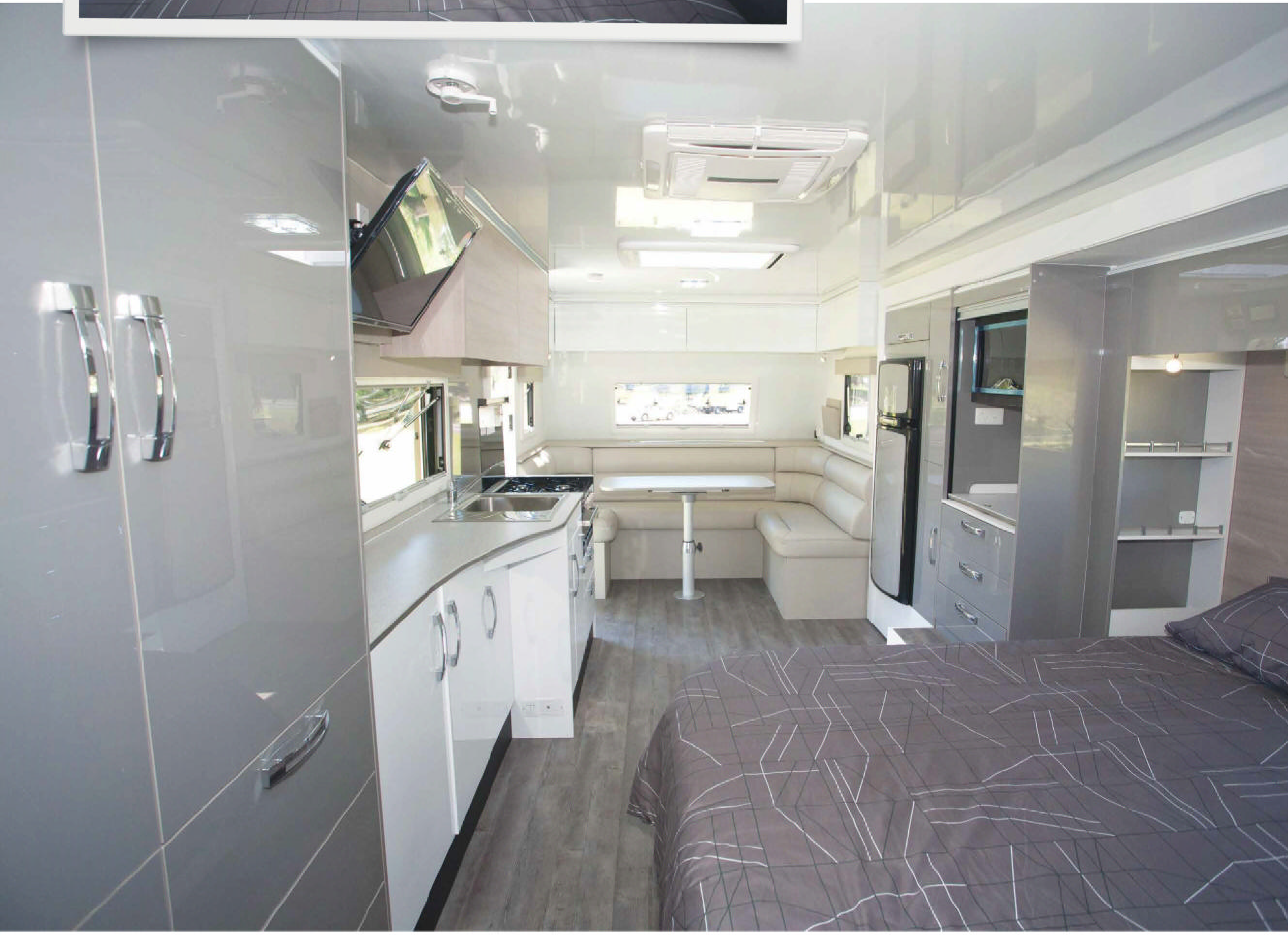
A benefit of a slide-out in a layout like this is that an island bed isn't too difficult to fit in. Measuring 1.9m x 1.53m (6ft 3in x 5ft), it's

slightly longer than the average caravan bed, which is good for taller persons. Both sides of the bed get a reading light, bedside shelves and an overhead locker, but only the left hand side has USB charger points. For the person on the bathroom side of the bed, it's a bit of a squeeze along the wall.

Given the layout with all the cabinetry opposite the bed, there's no shortage of hanger space nor somewhere for the socks and hankies because the cupboard and drawer capacity for the bedroom is quite generous, with two wardrobes and four large drawers.

LOUNGING IN STYLE

There's no doubt about the appeal of a front or rear club lounge. In this case being the former but with windows all round, it's a great place to relax and watch the world go by outside.



The U-shaped leather upholstered lounge is designed with comfort in mind, as well as ease of access. Asymmetrical in shape it will seat two easily and four if sitting close together isn't a problem. The table on its Zwaardvis pedestal can be moved around easily yet is very stable at the same time. Both a magazine pouch and 230V power point are fitted into the offside corner, as is the hot water switch but that's a somewhat awkward location. Overhead lockers are fitted above the windows, and I liked the shelf under the front window, however, there are no handy USB charger points. TVs are sometimes located in awkward viewing positions in some vans I have seen but this one, located on the wall opposite the bed, can be swung out and easily seen from the club lounge.

FOOD PREPARATION

Catering is well handled by the split kitchen. Designed as a one-piece cabinet, the nearside kitchen bench runs back into the bedroom area, which means if nothing else extra benchtop prep space. Fitted into the kitchen component is a four-burner hob and grill, along with a stainless steel sink and drainer. Overall kitchen storage is quite good with two overhead lockers, two drawers and a double cupboard. There's a couple of cupboards that can be used as either kitchen or bedroom storage.

RATINGS

VALUE FOR MONEY
★★★★★★★⯪☆☆
"It's certainly not a budget van but does have a high level of appointment."

TOWABILITY
★★★★★★★★☆☆
"Relatively heavy van but with right vehicle tows quite well."

SUITABILITY FOR INTENDED TOURING
★★★★★★★★⯪☆
"Well kitted out for rough road travel."

BUILD QUALITY
★★★★★★★⯪☆☆
"Generally speaking the van seemed to be well put together but with a few minor issues."

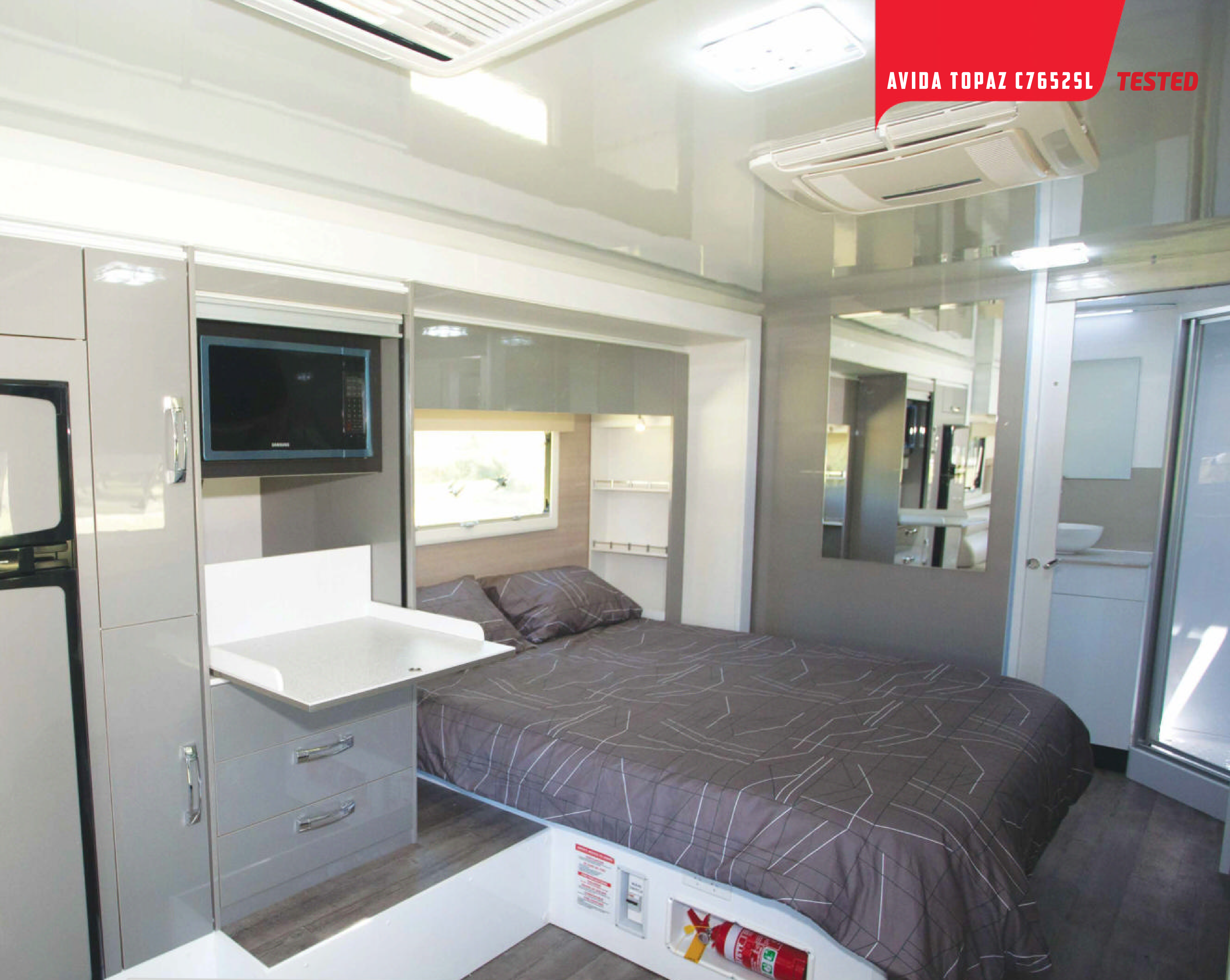
LIVEABILITY
★★★★★★★★⯪☆
"Not hard to sit back and relax in this layout."

SELF SUFFICIENCY
★★★★★★★★⯪☆
"Fitted with two 100Ah batteries, a 160W solar panel and a 125L grey water tank."

CUSTOMER CARE
★★★★★★★⯪☆☆
"3-year factory, 5-year structural, 2-year Avida RV Help."

INNOVATION
★★★★★★★⯪☆☆
"Avida's composite body structure is certainly a little different."

X-FACTOR
★★★★★★★★☆☆
"The slide-out creates a layout that's a little different to the usual."



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE The lounge seats four comfortably; A well-appointed bathroom is at the rear of the van and makes good use of the space; All electronics are easily checked and controlled; There is no shortage of bathroom storage space; The bed fits neatly in the slide-out to create some extra space

Facing the main kitchen bench, the cabinetry for the fridge and microwave oven is a little different. Whilst the 188L Thetford three-way fridge is conventionally located, the Samsung microwave oven is more or less at a user-friendly height with air space below. That allows for a slide-out shelf that can be used as extra kitchen prep space when needed and gets around the problem of the wheel arch that sticks out below.

A roller shutter door hides the microwave oven and shelf when not being used. Fitting in between the fridge and microwave oven area is a double wire basket pantry and there's three good sized drawers below the shelf space.

NEW TOYOTA LANDCRUISER 300 SAHARA

There's no doubt that we have all become very used to Toyota's LandCruiser 200 Series and for good reason — it's been around for the best part of 14 years and is a good tow vehicle — a long model run by anyone's standards, Toyota certainly followed the 'when you are on a good thing' mantra.

In the world of heavy caravan and boat towing, the 200 Series was the vehicle of choice for many a caravanner and for good reason. Its weight made it a very stable towing proposition and the big 4.5L turbodiesel made caravan towing an easy proposition.

Just checking a few other facts on the 200, the V8 delivered a maximum power of 200kW@3400rpm and a maximum torque of 650Nm@1600–2600rpm via a six-speed torque converter gearbox. Some of the other specifications included a kerb weight of 2720kg, a maximum towing mass of 3500kg and a Gross Combined Mass of 3300kg.

I mention some of those facts because when Toyota announced the new LandCruiser 300 Sahara, one of the changes that caused concern amongst the towing fraternity was the fact that the V8 turbodiesel is no more — the LandCruiser 300 Sahara comes with a 3.3L turbodiesel V6. Quelle horreur!

Here's the good news. Having now driven the new LandCruiser 300 with a fairly heavy van on the back, I reckon the V6 is a better performer — as it should be because it delivers more power (227kW) and torque (700Nm) all through a 10-speed automatic gearbox. My test run included the old Hume Highway over the Razorback Range west of Sydney. For anyone who doesn't know it, it's a fairly steep section of road and a good test for any towing combination, both for acceleration and braking, something the 300 Sahara passed with flying colours.

There are other reasons why the new 'Cruiser is a better performer. Aluminium panels are used for the doors, roof and bonnet, carving off at least 100kg and more (depending on the model) in weight. Some things haven't changed though — the 300 still has a ladder frame chassis, independent front suspension and a live rear axle.

That little weight saving is important because, although the Gross Vehicle Mass (GVM) and Gross Combined Mass (GCM) are slightly less than for the previous 200 model (3300kg/3280kg–6750kg/6800kg), the payload of the vehicle (650kg/580kg) is better as is the payload (620kg/580kg) of the 300 when towing the maximum 3500kg.

Being an upmarket model the Sahara includes quite a few goodies — wireless phone charging, roof rails, alloy wheels, side steps, 12.3in touchscreen, heated front seats, real leather upholstery, cooler box between the seats, CD player, powered tailgate, electric folding third row seats, heads up display, heating and ventilation for middle row seats, rear TV screens and a 14 speaker JBL sound system, just a name a few.

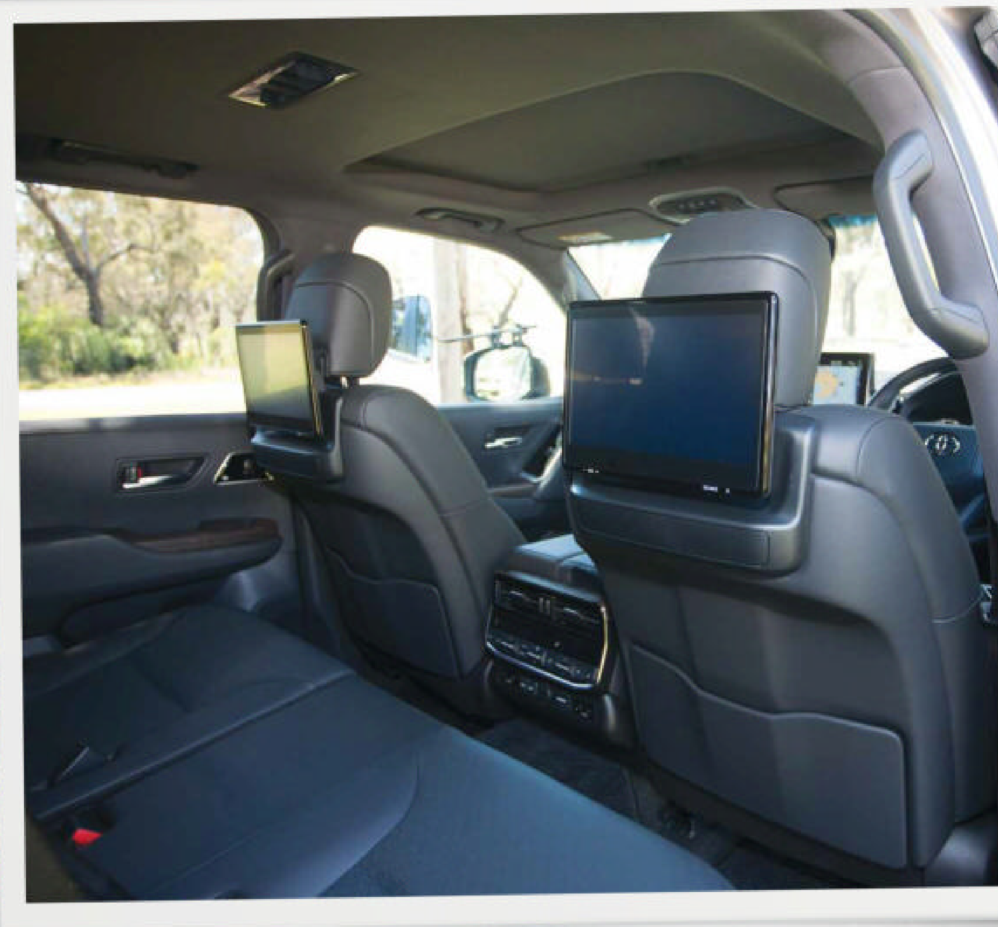
On the road, the new 300 is generally a better drive — certainly the steering felt more consistent around the corners and under braking I didn't get the feeling of an instability with the van on the back. It had electric brakes fitted of course.

There was one thing I did not like is the Sahara has a feature known as Lane Trace Assist, otherwise known as a lane cantering system, by which there's steering correction if you drift off lane. To say the least, it was distinctively unnerving when towing a caravan. At best if felt like the front wheels unweighting slightly and at worst like the bow wave of a truck approaching from the rear. I have to say it was more relaxing towing when I turned it off.

Apart from that, the 300 Cruiser with its Kerb Mass of 2630kg is a good towing platform for a caravan with a tare of nearly 2900kg, something better than the much lighter 3500kg towing mass rated utes.

AVIDA
TOPAZ
EPV-01B

CLOCKWISE FROM BELOW The new LandCruiser is an impressive vehicle; It was a smooth towing experience; An upgrade on a beloved vehicle, the Sahara lives up to its predecessor; The Toyota features a spacious interior



SPECS

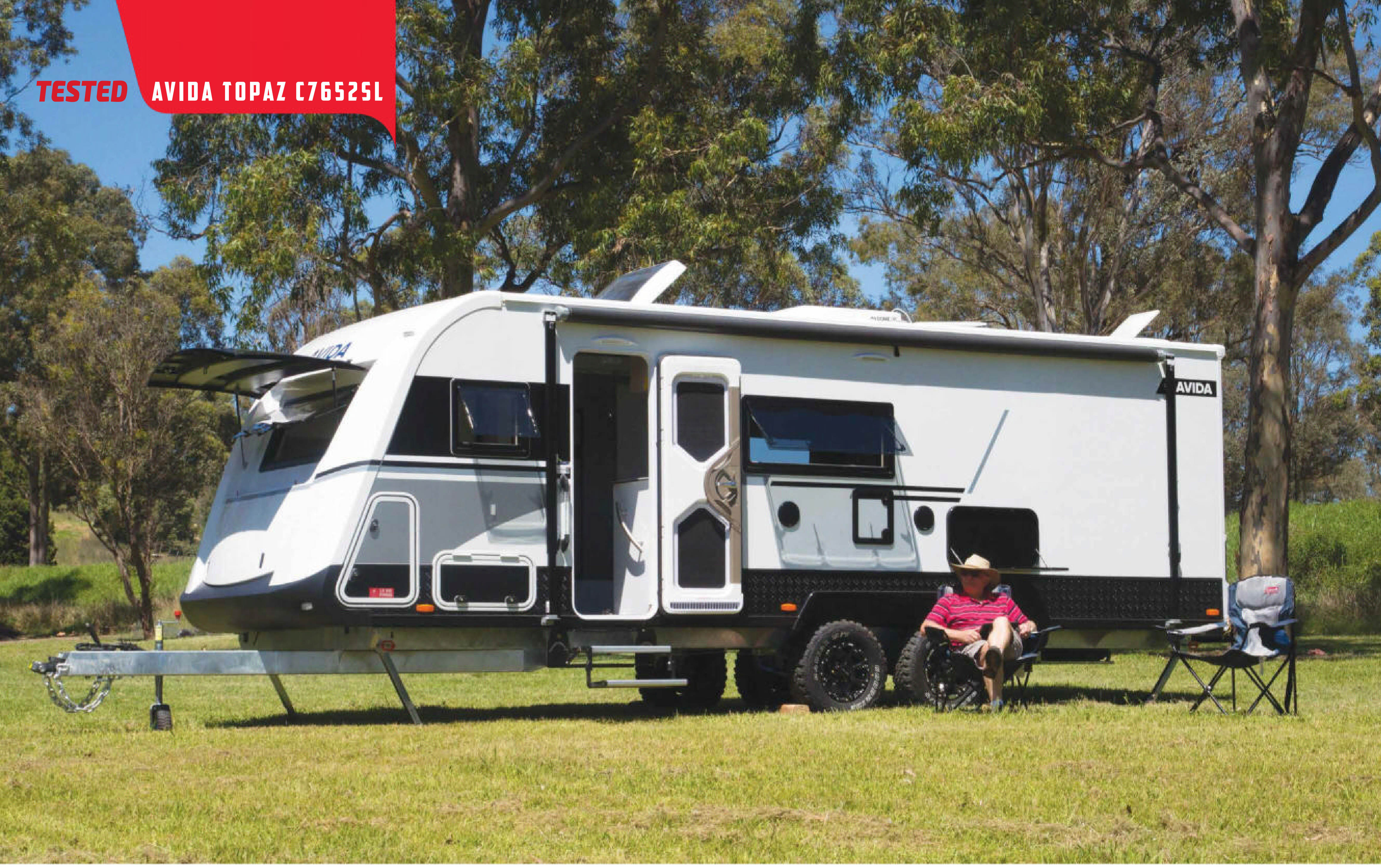
Engine 3.3L turbodiesel
Power 227kW@4000rpm
Torque 700Nm@1600-2600rpm
Gearbox 10 speed automatic with manual shift mode
Seating Seven
External length 4.98m (16ft 4in)
External width 1.98m (6ft 6in)
Kerb Mass 2630kg
GVM 3280kg
Payload 650kg
Maximum Towing Mass 3500kg
GCM 6750kg

POWER TO THE PEOPLE

The 12V electrics are supplied by two 100Ah deep cycle batteries that are charged by 160W of solar panel capacity or the 30A multi-stage charger built into the BMPRO BatteryPlus 35-11-HA battery management system (BMS). All is controlled by the aforementioned Odyssey touch panel that sits above the doorway. The two batteries are located in the offside area of the front tunnel storage, as is the BMS but being behind the batteries it's rather awkward to get at.

BODY BUILD

Underpinning the Topaz is a hot dipped galvanized chassis with 150mm x 50mm (6in x 2in) drawbar and chassis rails. All the water tanks, both fresh and grey, are mounted behind the suspension, and, a little unusually, so too is the spare wheel. It's right at the rear and reasonably easy to get to but does require getting the knees dirty to get it in and out. Up front the coupling a Cruisemaster DO35 pin hitch does its job properly but is a slight challenge at hitching up time – a good reversing camera is a useful item.



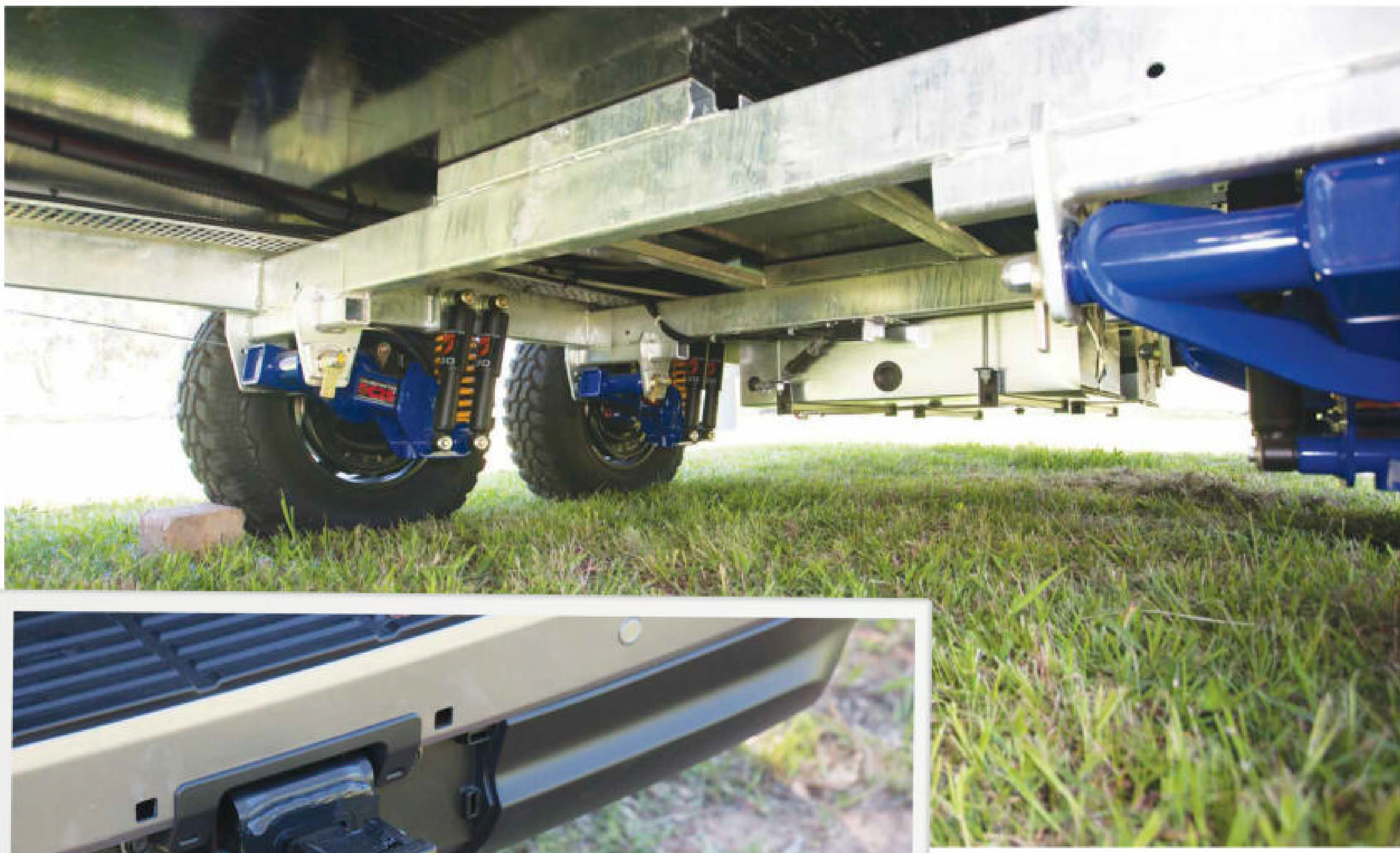
Built as a Multi Terrain model, the van is fitted with Cruisemaster's CRS, an independent setup with coil springs and two shock absorbers per wheel.

Sandwich panel construction is used throughout the Topaz for the walls, roof and floor. An aluminium extrusion is used to fit the walls to the floor and the walls are fixed to the top of the floor, not the side. To minimize leaks, one piece Fibreglass composite panels are used and have a polyurethane frame and high density polystyrene for insulation.

For storage, both a front boot and a front tunnel storage with access from both sides give a very generous are for stashing all the necessary camping items. That doesn't include the two 9kg gas cylinders because they have a dedicated bin at the front nearside.

THE BOTTOM LINE

From my brief time with the Topaz/ LandCruiser towing combination, I reckon it's a great setup. Certainly, for anyone desiring plenty of internal living space, the slide-out fitted Topaz has much to offer. It's a van packed with features and certainly all the necessary comfort items that we expect in a caravan today. Whilst it does make it a heavy van, the new LandCruiser certainly proved to be well and truly up to the task, thus making for a relatively relaxed towing experience.



TOP TO BOTTOM
The Topaz ranks high in liveability; There are two shock absorbers per wheel; A DO35 hitch is the perfect match for vehicle and van

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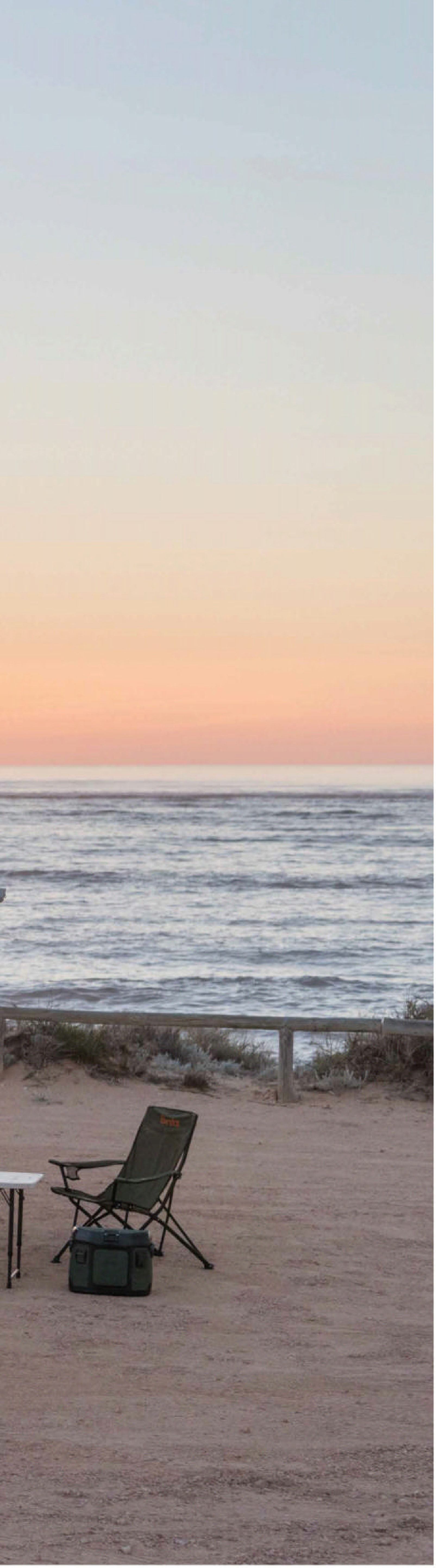
A SHORE THING

Planning an adventure to the coast? There are plenty of things to consider, no matter the season.

Words Cathy Anderson **Pics** Supplied

PROTECT DUNE VEG



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT Sunset happy hours are the best; Be sun smart when on holiday and check water conditions

Organising a trip to the coast is much more than simply throwing in your togs and towel (or ocean breeze-deflecting jacket if you're travelling in winter). There's a tonne of preparation when it comes to not only what you pack, but also your van's setup and your potential itinerary and travel time, says Wayne Park, Relationship Manager with caravan and RV finance brokerage, Credit One.

Every day, Park helps Aussies into the right kind of RV for the type of travel they want to do and, as an avid caravanner himself, he's well-placed to offer expert advice. Here are his best tips for planning a coastal trip filled with good memories.

A PURPOSEFUL RV

Before you leave the driveway, you need to be 100 per cent sure that the caravan, camper or motorhome you have is suited to the type of travel you intend to do. On-road vans will confidently travel the blacktop from one van park to the next with minimal effort. There are multiple hugely popular holiday parks along the shorefront all around Australia which are easily accessible by main highways or well-paved roads and offer equally simple access to a suitable site.

There are also plenty of coastal areas that are in national parks, part of large stations or just in remote spots that are also popular for those who want to stay off-grid as much as possible.

Offroad vans or campers with their beefed-up suspension offer a greater variety of traversable terrain, says Park. That said, the humble on-road caravan can access some great semi-offroad destinations, as long as the driver treats the van, the road, and the vehicle with respect.

"You need to make sure that the type of caravan that you are taking is suitable for the trip that you want to do, which would have been your motivation for buying it in the first place," he says. "But if you suddenly decide you would like to visit more remote destinations, you need to ensure your van can handle it."

Just because you have an on-road van doesn't mean you will be restricted to caravan parks only – it's easy these days to set any van up for off-grid use – you will just be limited to the destinations suitable to your van's build.

Park says there are other things you will need to be equipped with if you're keen on some beach-style free camping. "You need to make sure your rig has all the necessary features, whether they be solar panels to power the gas hot water, plus battery backup power and extra water capacity – just to make sure that it's all comfortable."

Park also suggests pre-planning meals so you can have enough room for perishable foods, particularly if you have only a small fridge and limited power supply. And then let's not forget the responsible planning of keeping all things cold for the sunset happy hours, so extra refrigeration may be required, especially if travelling in a group.

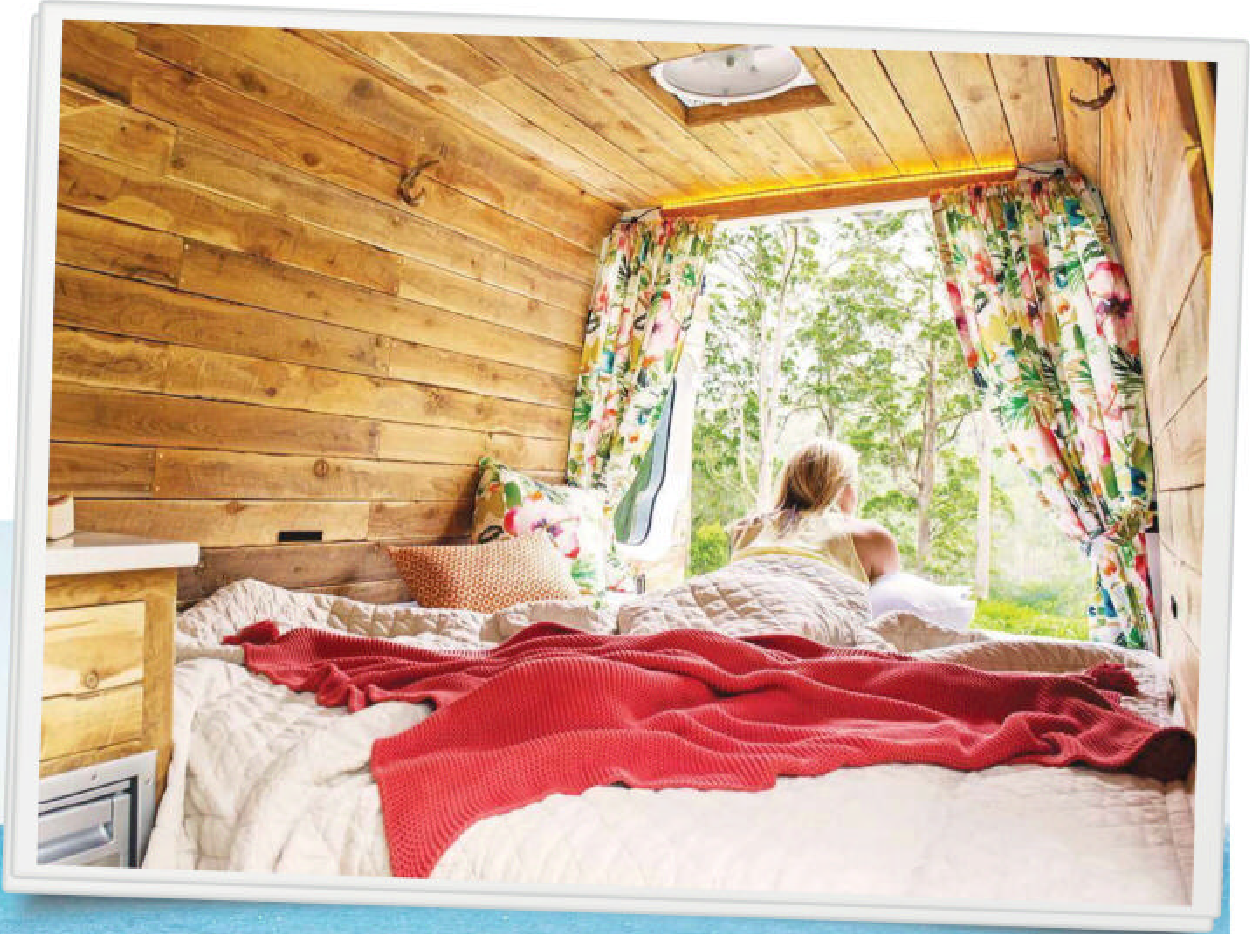
DRIVING THE PLAN

Your vehicle and your expertise in commanding it while towing also play a huge role in determining the itinerary of your beach holiday. Your tow vehicle needs to be up to the challenge both legally in terms of towing weight, but also capable of handling the terrain you want to tackle.

Driving to a coastal caravan park is one thing, but actually driving on to the sand to park up your van is a completely different kettle of fish, says Park. "It's not about just getting there, it's also about getting off the beach without getting bogged and having to get help you tow you out just because you didn't understand what you were doing," Park says. "If somebody just drove their normal 4WD on to the beach with a caravan behind it, they would probably get 20m before they were bogged. But if they get out, let the tyres down, know what gear to use and how to approach it, then you've got more chance of getting on and off the beach without having to call for assistance."

If you want to experience the beauty of beach camping with your RV, consider taking a towing course prior to your journey, and asking advice from your van and vehicle manufacturers about best practice. Caravanning legend Ron Moon has some expert advice for towing a rig on sand in this issue – check out page 32.

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE A hammock is a nice addition to your summer holiday; Beach camping can be brilliant, if you know what you're doing; RVs with less set up time will allow you to see more; An outdoor shower is perfect for sandy feet



CROWDED HOUSE

Beachfront parks, and those in coastal towns, are incredibly popular – particularly in the summer months when everyone wants to spend time in the water. Many sites are booked out year after year in peak seasons or raise their prices to capitalise on demand as families return each summer for their annual holidays. So, planning your itinerary in advance and booking ahead is imperative. "Parks will fill up fast in peak summer periods, so if you are planning ahead then you've got the certainty of having somewhere you can stay," Park says.

HOT AND COLD

Australia has some of the best beaches in the world, but coastal holidays aren't always about summertime fun. Many coastal adventures are best taken in winter to marvel at the blustery Southern Ocean pounding waves against the shore in Australia's southern states, track the annual migration of southern right whales up the east coast each June, or rugging up to watch rich sunsets over the horizon in Western Australia.

Park says weather conditions will play a huge role in deciding your itinerary depending on which direction you want to travel. "Plan your strategy about where you're going by understanding what the road conditions are like before you get there," he says. "Consider the weather in certain areas, especially if you're heading north, as it could be the season for cyclones or flooding."

BEACH, PLEASE

When considering a coastal trip, understanding water safety is essential. This means ensuring that everyone in your traveling party – kids and adults alike – have a healthy respect for large bodies of water and their temperaments. Being able to identify tide times, rips at surf beaches, understanding of what the flags mean at beaches patrolled by surf lifesaving clubs, or researching if there are local warnings are just some of the keys to a safe and happy adventure – jellyfish, anyone?

"Sometimes tides can be a lot larger in certain areas than other areas, especially if you're doing remote camping and you decide you want to throw your body into the surf," says Park. "It's just being safe, thinking before you leap."

He advises to check local websites, tourist information centres, and to ask park operators for advice. The same rules apply to areas with rivers, inlets or dams where swimming might be dangerous, and if using your own kayaks or hiring boats, locals are a great source of information.

CRACK THE SAFE

There are other safety aspects you need to consider with a coastal adventure. First up, everyone needs to be sun smart (that big old hole in the ozone layer isn't anyone's friend). Slip, slop, slap may be an old-fashioned catchphrase these days, but it's more appropriate than ever.

"What can ruin a two-week holiday really quickly is if you're traveling with the family and somebody gets really severely sunburned on the first day," Park says. "Be mindful of the elements."

Also consider your safety around other things that might bite on your coastal adventure, such as snakes, spiders, all manner of bugs, and potentially dingoes if you're making a trip to an area such as Fraser Island. And for heaven's sake, don't feed the seagulls!

MORE INFO

Interested in climbing aboard the RV bandwagon? Credit One is Australia's best-rated caravan finance broker and has access to a large number of financiers that can tailor a loan to suit your individual needs. That being either borrowing the entire amount or topping up with a partial loan to get the unit you really want. Having flexibility inside the loan to make extra repayments or to pay out the loan early is fast becoming the preferred option for many borrowers while keeping costs down. The Credit One Caravan team has a 22-year history of getting more people into this great lifestyle with a tailored loan as they deal with industry professionals day in and day out.

For more information about financing your dream or to obtain a pre-approval prior to negotiating with a dealer or private seller, make the smart choice and call the Credit One Caravan team on 1300 273 348, 07 3420 7030 or visit creditone.com.au.

Also, while a beach bonfire may seem romantic, it may also be a hazard, so check with the local fire service if it’s allowed.

IT’S IN THE BAG

Packing for a coastal adventure requires more than just your swimsuit and a towel (although you’ll undoubtedly need those in warmer weather). Take hats, rash vests and long sleeve shorts for sun protection, as well as sunscreen. For winter travel, rug up with warm wind-proof jackets and a beanie – but still remember the sunscreen for blue-sky days.

Throw in a fishing rod or two and maybe some hand reels to try your luck at catching dinner. Also, take sturdy shoes for beach walking or lightweight neoprene shoes for rock-hopping.

Park says there are a few other essentials you’ll need to enjoy a beachfront holiday. “Take some rope to use as a clothesline or to hang towels on after trips to the beach – it could just be that you run it between a couple of trees,” he says. “You could take some hammocks along but make sure you've got your outdoor chairs, and potentially some type of sunshade when you travel down to the beach itself.”

Another must-have is a dustpan and broom to keep the beach outside the van, not in it.

“Because kids don't care, they just run straight into the caravan and next thing you know, the whole place has got sand in it and you're dragging sand into your bed,” he says. “And honestly, that's not very pleasant! This comes from first-hand experience – I hate having to remake the bed every day.”

OLD SALTS

One of the most important things about a trip to the seaside is what you do when you get home. Salt water and salty air can be very corrosive, so Park says it’s vital for the longevity of your van that you clean your van as thoroughly as you can. This means not only the inside but washing down the outside with soap and water to remove any salty residue.

One of the main areas to be mindful of is underneath the van, which can be a tricky spot. But Park has a pro tip for owners. “A garden sprinkler is an easy way to wash off all the salt after a trip,” he says. “Simply place it underneath the camper, caravan or motorhome and move it around every now and then to reach all the nooks and crannies.”

> “Take hats, rash vests and long sleeve shirts *for sun protection, as well as sunscreen*”

PIONEER XC
EVOLUTION

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Beach camping is a great way to escape the crowds; Beefed-up suspension is needed for off-grid coastal touring; Plan your meals ahead of time to stay away longer; Resort parks are super popular in summer, especially with families

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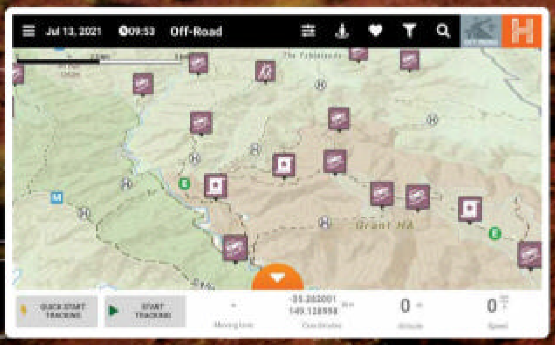
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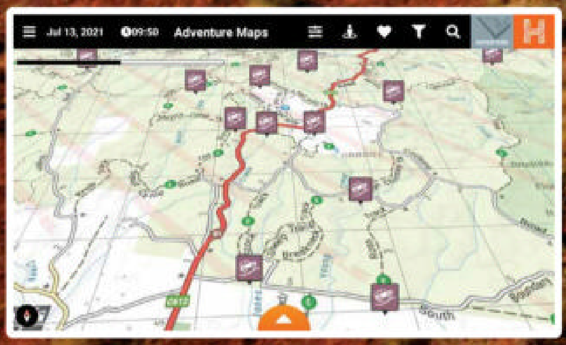
OFF-ROAD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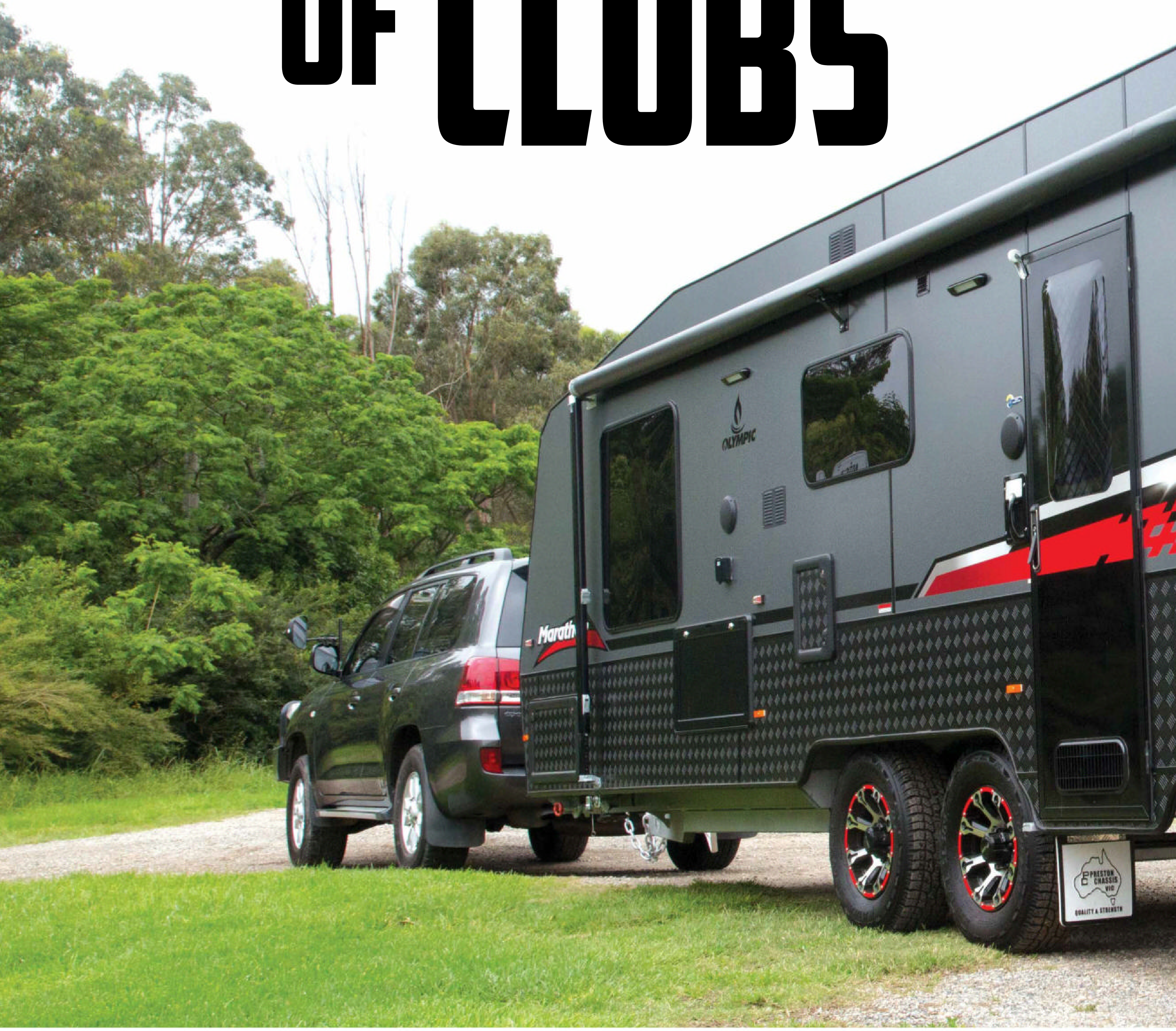
Words and Pics

MALCOLM STREET

Malcolm Street explores the hype around rear club lounge caravans and why they can be so advantageous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QUALITY & STRENGTH

IN BRIEF

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- Tandem axles with roller rocker suspension
- Rear club lounge layout
- ATM 2965kg

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CARAVANS & CAMPERS
SYDNEY & NEWCASTLE
9623 0400
4945 1377
rvconnection.com.au

In the world of Australian built caravans, there are layouts that are very popular, while others are less so and in some cases, this can be for less than obvious reasons. One particular layout in this category is vans that have a rear club lounge. It's a feature that's quite popular with our RV friends across the Tasman, but less so here.

I quite like the concept, so when I was considering a review of an Olympic caravan from Sydney Dealer, RV Connection, I opted for Olympic's Marathon model with a rear club lounge.

Olympic Caravans manufacture a range of models, the smallest being the single axle Sprinter pop-tops, and there's selection in between, then the Marathon models, which are the flagships with the 22ft 6in Club Lounge and carry the Commodore's Pendant.

It's a van that has an external length of 6.86m (22ft 6in) and a tare of 2465kg. The ATM of 2965kg results in a payload of 500kg. Those figures mean a wide selection of tow vehicles can be used, which is a plus for any caravan. For my towing experience, I was using a Toyota LandCruiser 200 Series, which was more than adequate and certainly made for relaxing drive – I make this point because frequently during the time of my tow test, it was raining quite heavily, which is certainly less than desirable and required more than the usual level of concentration, but the towed van came through with flying colours.

MEASURING UP

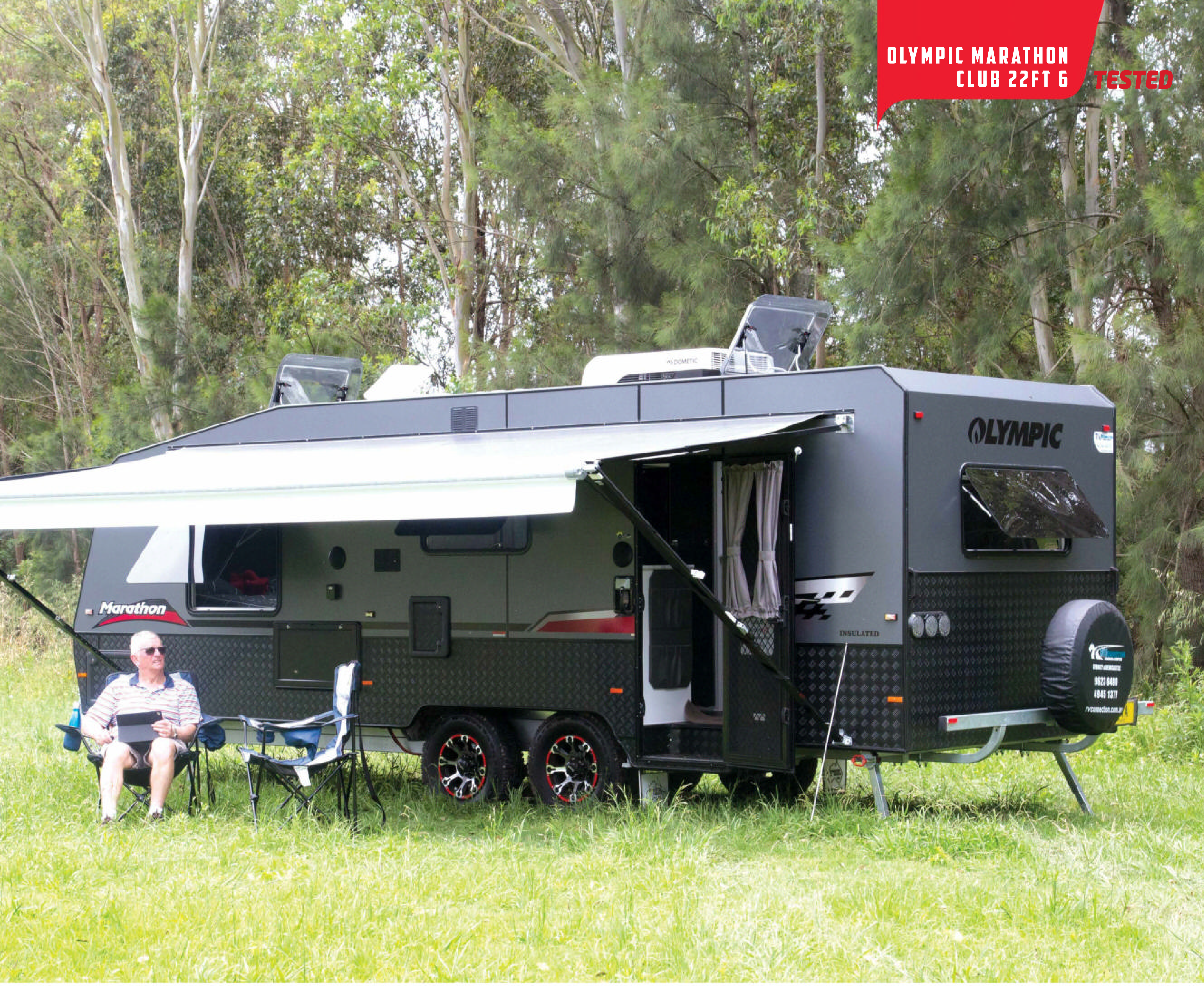
PROS

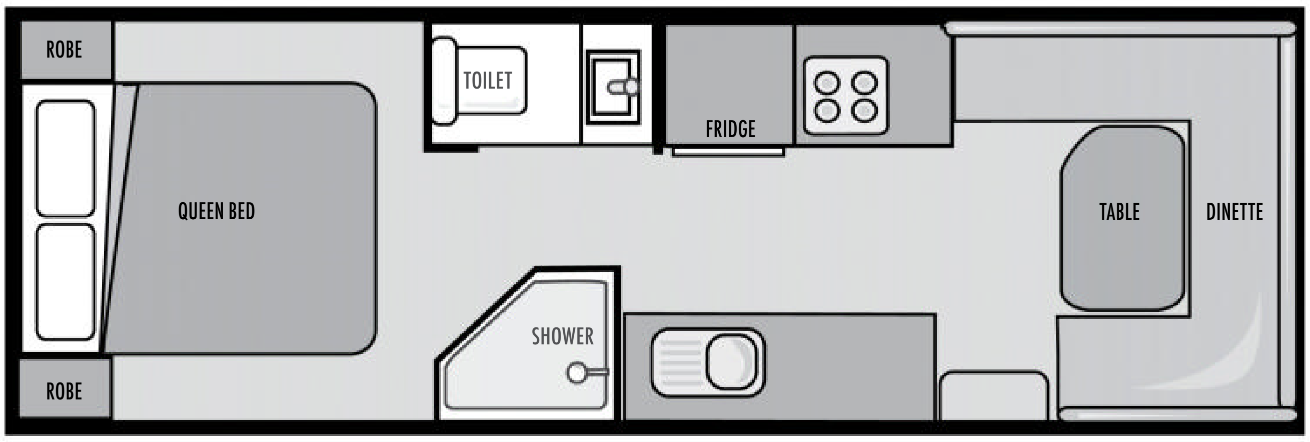
- Not an excessively heavy caravan
- Club lounge layout
- Decent sized kitchen area
- Ground clearance of van

CONS

- No USB charger points in living area
- Length of van might be a challenge in some caravan parks
- No rear nearside window

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE The Marathon towed effortlessly when it was raining; The dark grey exterior is stylish with the red and silver decals; 15-inch alloy wheels with red accents to match the van





GENERAL CONSTRUCTION

Finished in a stylish looking dark grey with contrasting red and silver decals, the Marathon has a Meranti timber frame and aluminium composite cladding – oh, and of course a lower waistline of black alloy checkerplate. The tinted NCE double glazed acrylic windows looked the part, as did the alloy wheels and the raked front wall.

In addition to the awning, the body also sports the usual features like front tunnel storage, picnic table, entertainment unit and external speakers. Evenings spent under the awning are going to be a pleasant experience and when night falls, there are two wall lights and a grab handle light by the entry door.

A look underneath the van reveals a SupaGal box section chassis with 150mm x 50mm (6in x 2in) RHS main rails, similarly sized drawbar rails and 50mm x 50mm (2in x 2in) cross members.

Roller rocker suspension is used for the tandem axles, a simple but effective way of linking the springs through a 'rocker' assembly to ensure load sharing when the ground is very uneven. The alloy wheels are fitted with 10in electric brakes.

Both 95L freshwater tanks are located forward of the axles, leaving space behind for the grey water tank. Including the drain from the grey tank, most of the plumbing and electrics are strapped up safely out of the way. In addition to the usual items, a gas bayonet sits just under the front awning mount.

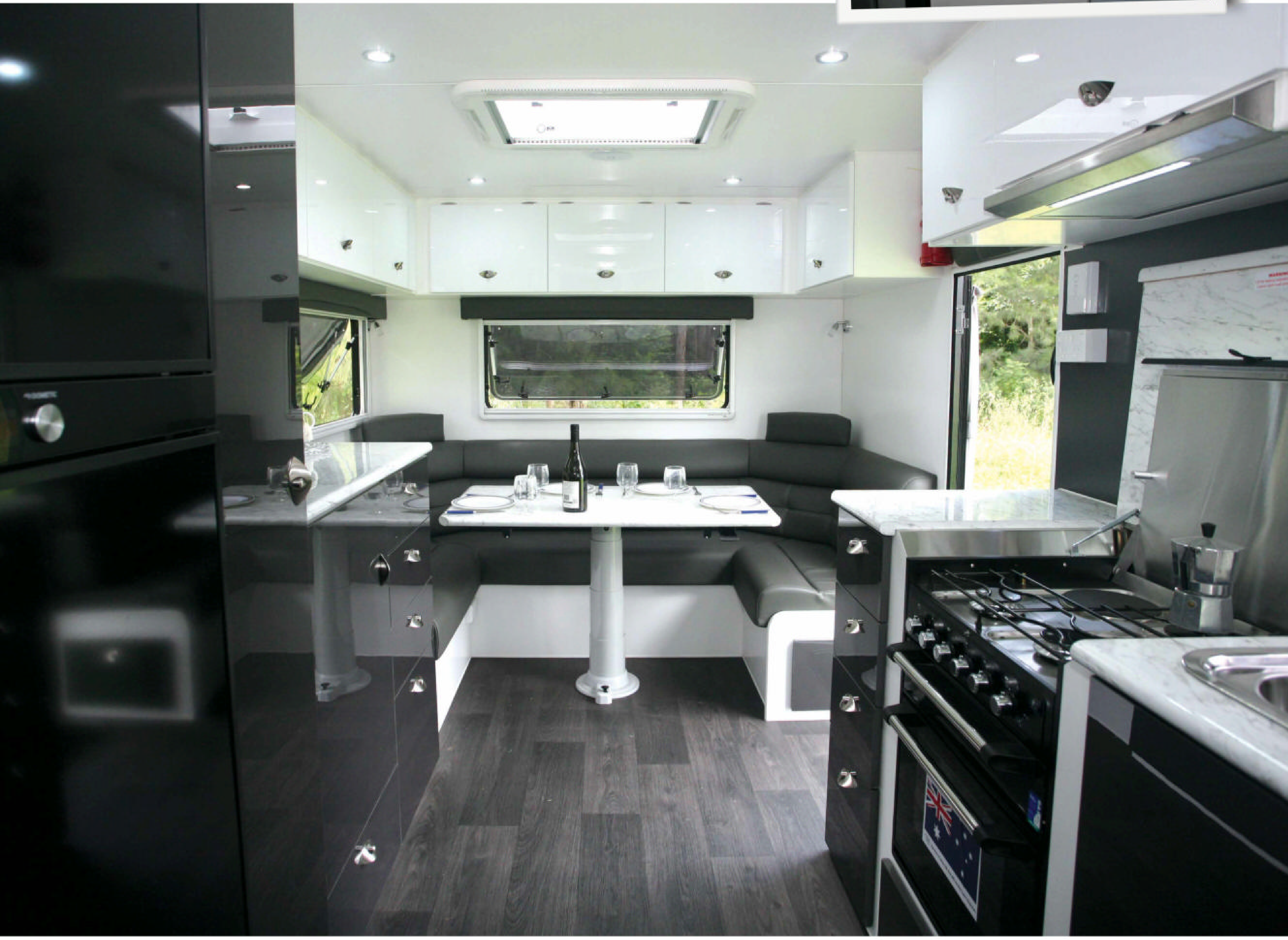
SYSTEM ELECTRICS

A 12V system these days has some essential requirements, and the Marathon Club has all of them – a 100Ah deep cycle battery, 160W of solar capacity and a 15A CTEK mains battery charger are all included. The main electrical controls – 240V circuit breaker, solar charge controller and 12V fuses – are all located in a locker above the kitchen bench.

STEP ABOARD

Black, white and grey give the interior of the Marathon a somewhat monochromatic look but that does seem to be the trend these days. A mostly glossy finish, particularly the white of the overhead lockers and ceiling helps dispel any sensation of a less than sparkling interior. Like most manufacturers, Olympic makes full use very bright but low energy LED lighting. Even in daylight it's obvious when the lights are on.

As mentioned previously, this van has a club lounge in the rear area. When stepping through the habitation door, it's one of the first things that catches the eye and certainly an invite to sit down and relax whilst checking out the rest of the van. The club lounge overlooks the kitchen area and in the other half of the van an amenities area separates the kitchen from the front bedroom.



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT The monochromatic look of the Marathon is easily brought to life with colourful decor; There is ample storage throughout the van; The club lounge accommodates four and faces the kitchen; A split setup bathroom with shower on one side and toilet on the other

OLYMPIC MARATHON CLUB

WEIGHTS AND MEASURES

Body length 6.86m (22ft 6in)
Overall length 8.85m (29ft)
Width 2.44 (8ft)
Height 2.94m (9ft 8in)
Tare 2465kg
ATM 2965kg
Payload 500kg
Ball weight 250kg

EXTERNAL

Frame Meranti timber
Cladding Composite Aluminium
Chassis SupaGal 150mm/6in rails and drawbar
Suspension Roller rocker leaf spring
Coupling Ball
Brakes 10in elec
Wheels 15in alloy
Water 2 x 95L fresh, 95L grey
Battery 1 x 100Ah
Solar 1 x 120W
Air-conditioner Dometic Ibis 4
Gas 2 x 9kg
Sway control No

INTERNAL

Cooking Swift four-burner, grill & oven
Fridge Dometic RUA6408X 188 litre
Bathroom Thetford cassette & separate shower cubicle
Hot water Swift 28L, gas and electric

OPTIONS FITTED

- Dark grey composite cladding
- 95 litre grey water tank
- 24in TV/DVD player

PRICE AS SHOWN

$74,990

MORE INFORMATION

RV Connection
97C Glossop Street, North St Marys NSW 2760
Ph: (02) 9623 0400
Web: rvconnection.com.au

THE PIÈCE DE RÉSISTANCE

One of the attractions of a club lounge, apart from the neatly done upholstery work, is the ability to be comfortably seated and watch the world going by outside at the same time through the rear and offside window. All that's missing here is a window on the nearside, but there is the door of course.

Designed to accommodate four people, the table is mounted on a Nuova Mapa telescopic table leg which means it can be moved up or down and from side to side as needed. Additionally, the table can be lowered, and the lounge used as a bed for overnight visitors. Reading lights are fitted into both corners and there's a power point below seat level on the offside. The rear wall overhead lockers are a bit of a stretch but do provide a decent amount of extra storage space. There's also a drawer under the nearside seat which is handy from both inside the van and from outside the door.

SPLIT KITCHEN

For travelling cordon bleu cooks, split kitchens solve a problem that's prevalent in many a van – limited food preparation space. In this case, it's not such an issue and the bench area on both sides is quite generous, as is the drawer, wire basket pantry, cupboard and overhead locker space, although one of the larger cupboards on the offside does contain a front loading 3kg washing machine, but that's an okay compromise.

Fitted into the nearside bench are the usual accoutrements – four burner cooktop/grill/oven, stainless steel sink and microwave oven. On the opposite side, the Dometic three-way, 188L fridge is mounted off the floor at a user-friendly height.

RATINGS

VALUE FOR MONEY
★★★★★★★★☆☆
"It's a van that offers a considerable living space."

TOWABILITY
★★★★★★★★⯪☆
"Mid to large size tow vehicle needed but the van certainly tracks along very nicely."

SUITABILITY FOR INTENDED TOURING
★★★★★★★★⯪☆
"Road going van with room to move."

BUILD QUALITY
★★★★★★★⯪☆☆
"Most things were where they should be and opened and closed as required."

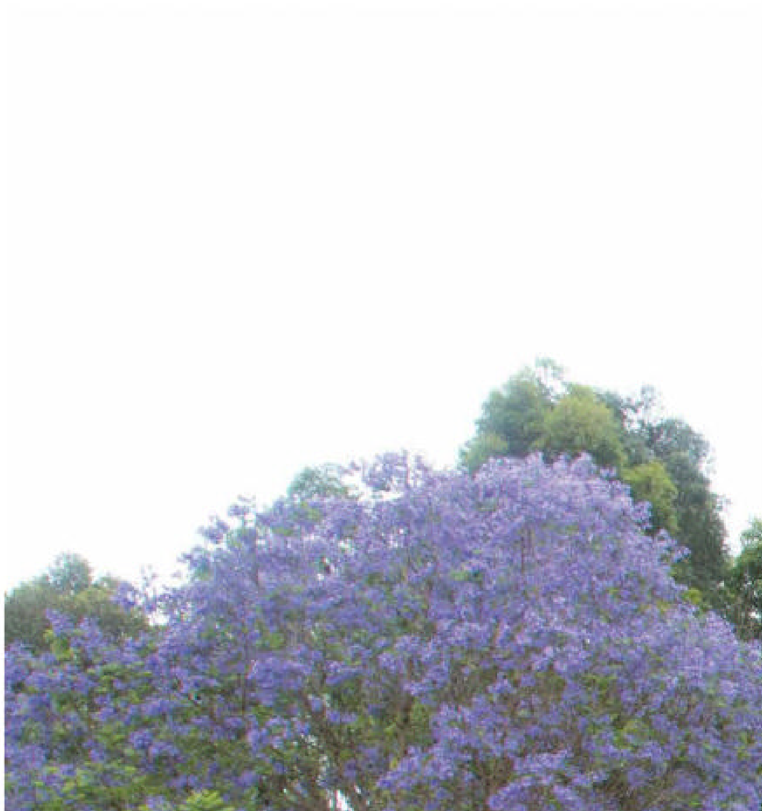
LIVEABILITY
★★★★★★★★⯪☆
"An easy living van with room to move."

SELF SUFFICIENCY
★★★★★★★☆☆☆
"Has all the electrical essentials but no grey water tank."

CUSTOMER CARE
★★★★★★★⯪☆☆
"Two-year manufacturer warranty, components as per individual manufacturers."

INNOVATION
★★★★★★⯪☆☆☆
"Nothing particularly notable."

X-FACTOR
★★★★★★★★⯪☆
"Rear club lounge layout."



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE The bedroom feels roomy with the large windows on either side of the bed; Everything is securely tucked away inside or in the sides of the van; The Olympic Marathon is generously spaced and allows for an easy drive

WASHING FACILITIES

A concertina curtain separates the bathroom area from the rest of the living area. It's a split setup with the shower cubicle on the nearside and the toilet facility opposite. There's a reasonable amount of turn around space in the shower cubicle and an angled door means it's not too intrusive in the bedroom area. Fitted into the cubicle is a flick mixer tap and a flexible hose outlet.

The toilet cubicle contains a bench style Thetford cassette toilet, as well as a small vanity cabinet complete with cupboard, pedestal wash basin and a wall mirror. Above the loo is a towel rail plus a small overhead locker. It's not a space hogger from the outside but there's still room to move inside

BY NIGHT

An advantage of this layout is that it gives a more private bedroom area, and the slightly confined space feel is nicely offset by the large windows on either side and the decent sized roof hatch above.

The bedroom layout is relatively conventional, the island bed having an innerspring mattress on top of a posture slat bed base. Each bed occupant gets a wardrobe, drawer, a 240V mains power point and USB charger outlets – an almost obligatory requirement these days. Given the level of appointment, I was almost expecting to see pillow cubbies, but they are not provided.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Olympic's Marathon ticks quite a few boxes. For towing, the van isn't excessively heavy and will be an easy drive behind a fair range of vehicles. Inside, the club lounge layout offers quite a few practicalities, not to mention comforts – all in a generously spaced interior.

LEFT TO RIGHT The source of the Snowy River; Bush camping at Thredbo Diggings

Gravity: the force that attracts objects towards one another. You probably wouldn't notice it, but Mt Kosciuszko has an unusually high reading of it, a discovery that led to scientists' most recent theory that Australia's highest range was formed by convection, a pushing up of the earth's mantle as opposed to the more common 'plates colliding' scenario. Whatever the science of it, there's no doubt the region has a magnetic pull that draws people to visit, and lovers of the great outdoors are the biggest winners.

THE ALPINE WAY

Just getting to the Snowy Mountains is an adventure in itself. A major access route from the west from Khancoban to Jindabyne makes for a stunning drive, plus it's lined with epic bush campgrounds. While the western end of The Alpine Way is super winding and often narrow – not recommended if you're towing something big – you can still explore it from the eastern approach as far as Thredbo without challenge. Thredbo Diggings is one of the most popular campgrounds, and for good reason. It's nestled amongst the snow gums, right on the Thredbo River – perfect for swimming and fishing. Ngarigo has a better access road if you need a little more manoeuvrability, or head for spacious Tom Groggin camp on the banks of the upper Murray River.

Take the High Ground

Skiing and snowboarding dominate the Snowy Mountains in winter — but there's a whole lot more to this region than simply snow

Words and Pics **LAURA WATERS**

AJU·41R
Jayco
Sterling
Sterling
OUTBACK

These campsites are a destination in themselves where you can happily read a book and listen to the rush of a river for hours, but if you feel like a little action you can always use the extensive recreational facilities at Lake Crackenback Resort with the purchase of a day pass. At $10 per person it's great value, giving free rein on the nine-hole golf course, archery, disc golf, canoeing, trampolines, low ropes course, tennis courts, and loads more.

You're deep in the heart of *The Man From Snowy River* country here, which makes it a really appealing option to mount your own horse and take a scenic trail ride through the beautiful Thredbo Valley. Anyone from complete beginners to experienced riders can have a go.

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE **The Thredbo River** glides past Thredbo Diggings; Adrenaline junkies are well-catered for; An abundance of furry neighbours at Tom Groggin campground; Thredbo Diggings is an excellent place to set up base camp

THREDBO

This ski resort village pumps even in summer, with dozens of kilometres of hiking and biking trails, a 700m alpine bobsled track, two chairlifts and a gondola accommodating sightseers, hikers and mountain bikers, plus a nine-hole golf course and tennis. After a day playing on the mountains, grab a bite at The Local Pub or, if there is an event on, the Alpine Bar is a great place to grab an alfresco drink while sitting around the fire pits and listening to live music.

Thredbo is one of Australia's best biking destinations with cross-country and downhill trails, a skills park and skills clinics. The new 3.2km Sidewinder trail is ideal for beginners wanting to roll with gravity on a gentle rollercoaster from the top of Merritts Gondola through some beautiful terrain. If you don't have your own steed, you can rent one.

Just cruising the village loop on an e-bike is a great way to soak up the views – but if you really want to stretch your legs, try the Thredbo Valley Track which meanders 35km along the banks of the Thredbo River and through open grasslands and eucalyptus forests between Thredbo and Jindabyne (avoid the eastern end unless you're an advanced rider).

LAKE EUCUMBENE

The Snowy Mountains are often touted as one of the best bait and fly fishing destinations in New South Wales, and its pristine rivers and lakes are regularly topped up with rainbow and brown trout by NSW Fisheries.

In fishing circles Lake Eucumbene is one of the most popular, and it's huge with gnarled fingers reaching across 145 square kilometres. The surrounding landscape is pretty barren but has its own appeal, and a couple of camping areas around the shore allow plenty of room to spread out and enjoy your own patch. On the southern point, Buckenderra Holiday Village covers 100 acres of bush and campers are able to set up right on the 8km of shoreline. At the western edge, Braemar Bay Holiday Park is another good choice and has a boat ramp.

In such a huge lake, places to drop a line are abundant – but a few top spots include James Creek Inlet, Big Tolbar Inlet, and Anglers Reach. Summer is when you'll find the most fish, although in winter they're larger and closer to the surface.

At 1200m, temperatures can get pretty fresh at Lake Eucumbene all year round (snow can fall in summer!). It's pretty isolated, so go prepared with everything you need. Cooma, a 25-minute drive away, is your closest town for food resupply.

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Lakeside setup at Lake Jindabyne; Wake up on the shores of Lake Eucumbene at Buckenderra Holiday Park; Pick up some excellent food and wine in Berridale; Braemar Bay, Lake Eucumbene is a popular spot

> *"The Snowy Mountains are often touted as one of the best bait and fly fishing destinations in New South Wales, and its pristine rivers and lakes are often topped up with rainbow and brown trout"*

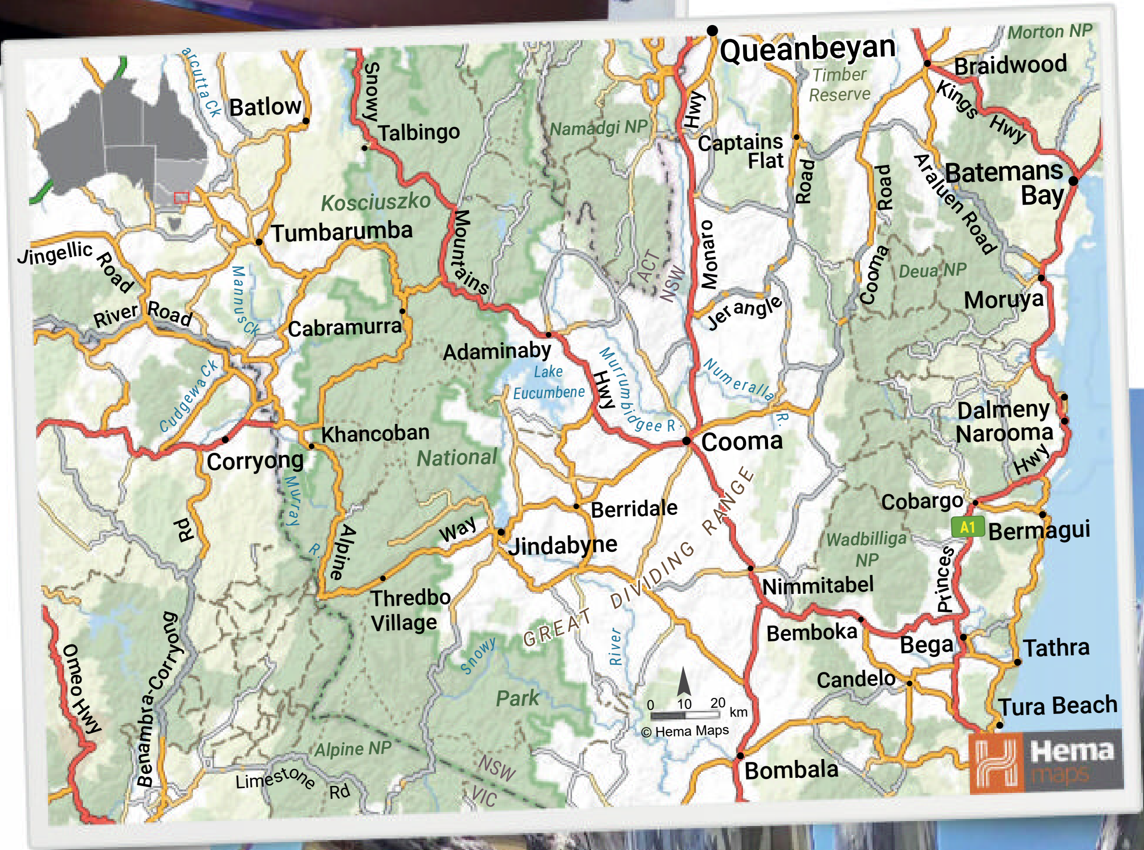
COOMA

Officially the largest town in the Snowy Mountains, Cooma has all the services you'd expect from a regional base but probably its biggest attraction is the Snowy Hydro Discovery Centre, which is actually much more interesting than it sounds. Much of the region was built on the back of The Snowy Scheme, a project that began construction in 1949 and attracted workers building towns and infrastructure, and creating the lakes that so many now flock to.

The visitor centre does a great job of explaining the history of what was a hugely ambitious engineering feat and why it's often credited with being the launching pad of multiculturalism in Australia – of the 100,000 workers needed, 60 per cent were migrants from more than 30 different countries. There's loads of memorabilia, including photos from the construction period, old equipment and personal stories of the workers who came from far and wide, bringing their food and culture with them. It's also pretty cool to see live data (aka 'scheme intelligence') on the workings of a system that encompasses nine power stations, 16 major dams, and 145km of tunnels.

On your way there from Jindabyne, drop in at Shut the Gate Wines in Berridale, a super cute and leafy cellar door which is not only bursting with tasty wines but also lots of gourmet food and pre-packaged meals to go.

CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT Snowy Hydro Discovery Centre; Wildbrumby Distillery produces award-winning gin and schnapps; Lovely Lake Jindabyne; The Snowy Mountains places you at the heart of brumby country; Beautiful old snow gums at Charlotte Pass


Queanbeyan
Timber Reserve
Morton NP
Braidwood
Kings Hwy
Batlow
Talbingo
Snowy
Namadgi NP
Hwy
Captains Flat
Road
Batemans Bay
Araluen Road
Kosciuszko
Tumbarumba
Mountains
ACT
NSW
Monaro
Cooma
Deua NP
Moruya
Jingellic
Road
River Road
Mannus Ck
Cabramurra
Jerangle
Adaminaby
Lake Eucumbene
Murrumbidgee R
Numeralla R
Dalmeny
Narooma
Hwy
Cudgewa Ck
Corryong
Khancoban
National
Cooma
Cobargo
Rd
Murray R
Alpine
Way
Jindabyne
Berridale
RANGE
Wadbilliga NP
A1
Bermagui
Thredbo Village
DIVIDING
GREAT
Nimmitabel
Princes
Omeo Hwy
Benambra-Corryong
Snowy
River
Bemboka
Bega
Tathra
Candelo
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© Hema Maps
Tura Beach
Alpine NP
Limestone Rd
NSW
VIC
Bombala
Hema maps

fast FACTS

THINGS TO DO

- The Snowy Mountains are a playground for fishing, hiking, biking and more.
- Drop a line in at dozens of rivers and lakes, download the Kosciuszko National Park Thredbo-Perisher area walks guide from nationalparks.nsw.gov.au, or check out the extensive graded bike trail network at thredbo.com.au.
- Grab a day pass at Lake Crackenback Resort for unlimited access to their outdoor activities, lakecrackenback.com.au.
- Mt Stilwell guided walk, Snowy Mountains Walking Company, snowywalks.com.
- Gaden Trout Hatchery, 224 Gaden Rd, Jindabyne, dpi.nsw.gov.au.
- Thredbo Valley Horse Riding, Pender Lea Chalets, Alpine Way, Crackenback, thredbovalleyhorseriding.com.
- Snowy Hydro Discovery Centre, Monaro Hwy, Cooma, snowyhydro.com.au.

CAMPING

- Book bush camps such as Thredbo Diggings, Tom Groggin and Ngarigo through nationalparks.nsw.gov.au.
- NRMA Jindabyne Holiday Park, 6 Kosciuszko Rd, Jindabyne, nrmaparksandresorts.com.au/jindabyne.
- Buckenderra Holiday Village, 490 Buckenderra Rd, Buckenderra, buckenderra.com.au.
- Braemar Bay Holiday Park, 364 Braemar Bay Rd, Braemar Bay, braemarbayholidaypark.com.
- Snowy River Holiday Park, 1 Hamilton Street, Dalgety (resident platypus can be spotted in the adjacent river), snowyriverholidaypark.com.au.

EATING & DRINKING

- Wildbrumby Distillery, Alpine Way, Thredbo, wildbrumby.com.
- Shut the Gate, 39 Jindabyne Rd, Berridale, shutthegate.withwine.com.
- Birchwood Cafe, 3/3 Gippsland St, Jindabyne, birchwoodcafe.com.au.
- Café Darya, 3 Kosciuszko Rd, Jindabyne, cafedarya.com.au.
- The Local Pub, Friday Drive, Thredbo Village, thredbo.com.au.

TIPS

- You'll need a permit to visit Kosciuszko National Park, payable on entry.
- Snow chains are required for vehicles entering the park in winter. Check road conditions before heading out.
- Fishing licences are available from NSW Fisheries.

JINDABYNE

Although it is 34 kilometres from the nearest ski run, there's a definite ski town vibe in 'Jindy,' perched on the shores of Lake Jindabyne. It's friendly, compact, and easily walkable. Timber and stone buildings are full of cosy bars, cafes and outdoor shops bulging with fishing tackle, snow gear, mountain bike accessories and outdoor clothing, and you're never far from beautiful views of its sprawling cobalt lake backed by rolling hills.

Situated 400m lower than Lake Eucambene, Lake Jindabyne is a more appealing (read, warmer) option if you're looking to do some water skiing, kayaking or jet skiing, and the fishing is great too. Several campgrounds let you set up within a stone's throw of the water's edge.

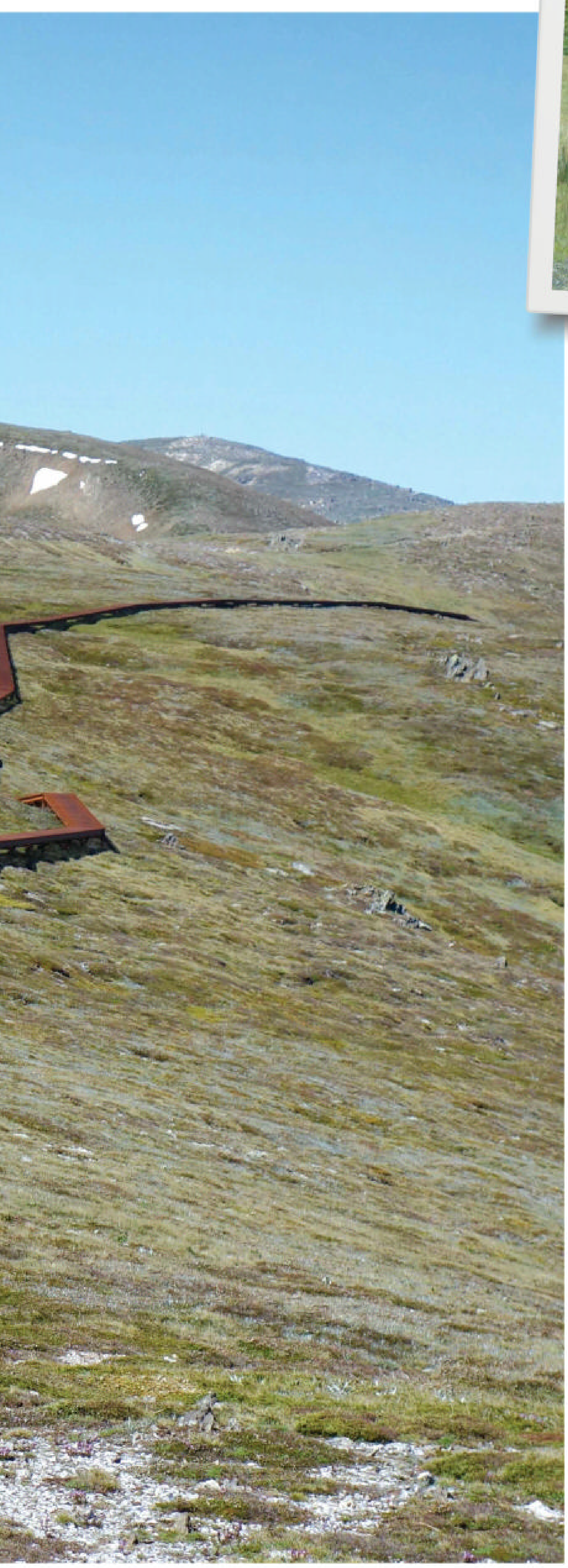
With fishing being such a draw for the region, a visit to nearby Gaden Trout Hatchery makes for an enlightening visit where Atlantic salmon, brook trout, brown trout, and rainbow trout are bred to stock the region's lakes and rivers. From tiny fingerlings to lively big fish in the brood stock ponds, visitors get to understand the hatchery's operations on a guided tour and maybe pick up some wood-smoked trout on the way out.

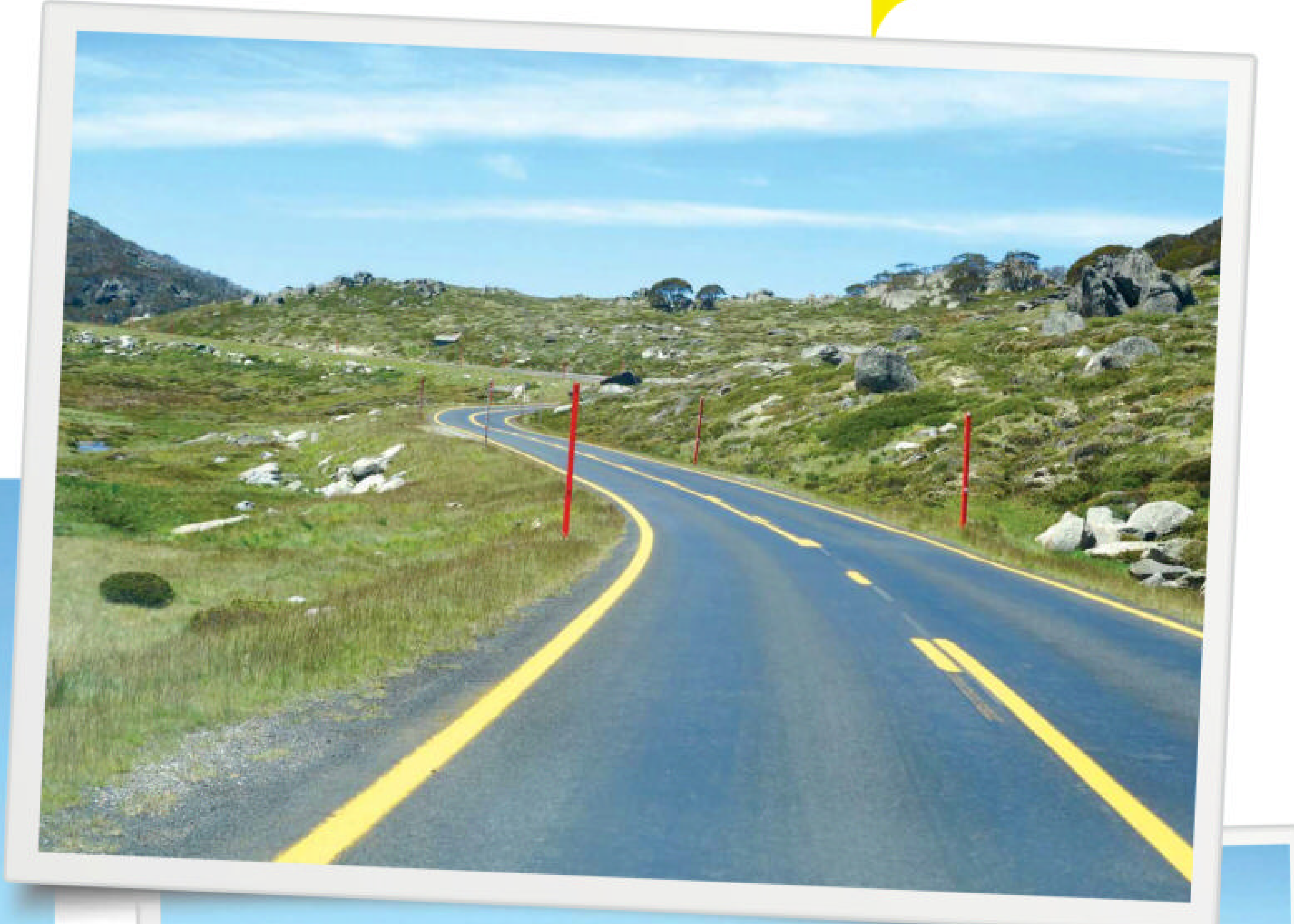
If good food matters, a visit to Wildbrumby Distillery, a 10-minute drive from Jindabyne, is a must. Here you can sample some award-winning gin and schnapps with flavours like Pink Lady apple, butterscotch and sour cherry at the Distillery Door, or settle in for a leisurely meal at the indoor/outdoor cafe. Wildbrumby has been known to host artists in residence, and their expansive sculpture garden makes for a lovely amble.

TRADITIONAL OWNERS

The Traditional Owners of the Snowy Mountains region in New South Wales are the Ngarigo, Walgalu, Ngunnawal, and Bidhawal Peoples. We pay respects to Elders past, present, and emerging.

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT
Plenty of room at Tom Groggin campground; Driving the Kosciuszko Road to Charlotte Pass; The Main Range Track to Kosciuszko is epic; A new boardwalk on the Main Range Track helps protect the environment underfoot





MT KOSCIUSZKO

There's nothing quite like the thrill of knowing you're the highest person in the entire country. The scenic Kosciuszko Road used to go from Jindabyne all the way to the top, but in 1976 it was cut short to finish at Charlotte Pass so now you need to walk or ride a bike the remaining distance if you want to summit. A fairly gently climbing gravel road goes most of the way (18km return) or, if you've got the energy, a far more spectacular option is to hike the 22km Main Range loop which undulates past some stunning alpine lakes and mountain views en route to the summit.

Another alternative is to start in Thredbo and ride the Kosciuszko Express chairlift to 1930m from where you can walk the remaining 7km to the summit at 2228m. If you're going to explore these alpine trails, be sure to check the forecast and go prepared for all weather conditions. You can easily go from t-shirt to rain jacket and beanie and back again in a day, and getting scorched by the alpine sun is a real possibility.

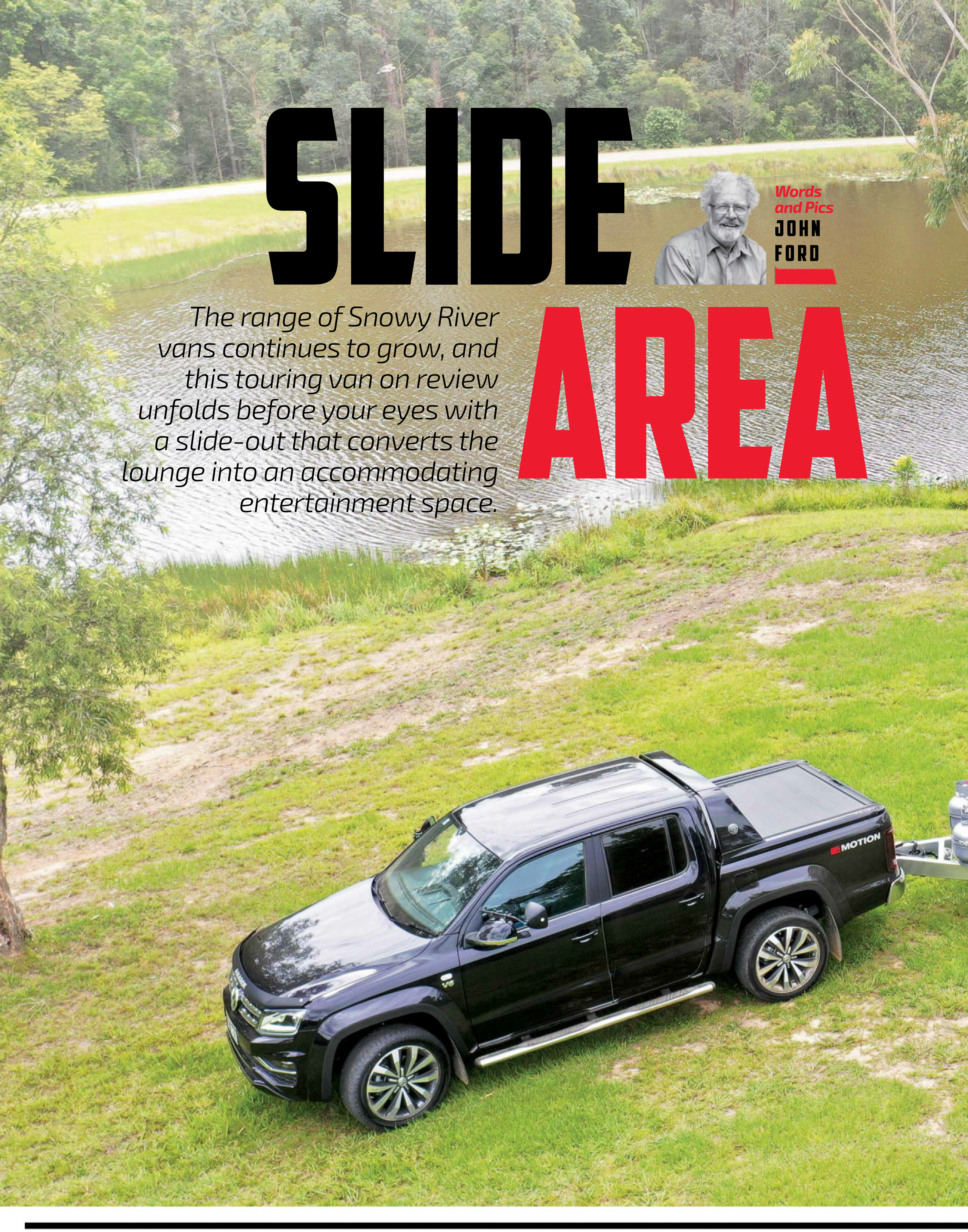
A far less well-trodden option is to take a half day guided walk from Charlotte Pass with Snowy Mountains Walking Company to Mt Stilwell and the ruins of the old Thredbo Chairlift. In the 1960s, it was the longest chairlift in the world until it closed within two years when it became evident that strong crosswinds were making operations unfeasible. Few would discover this pretty walk filled with wildflowers and twisted snowgums without a guide, and 'Didj' is a real character and hugely knowledgeable on the history, flora, and geology of the region.

Any which way you explore the roof of Aus, you'll end up on a high.

SLIDE AREA

Words and Pics
JOHN FORD

The range of Snowy River vans continues to grow, and this touring van on review unfolds before your eyes with a slide-out that converts the lounge into an accommodating entertainment space.



SNOWY RIVER
CARAVANS
SRC-TWENTY TWOS

IN BRIEF

- 22ft couples touring van
- Slide-out lounge
- Full ensuite

RIGHT The leather dinette seats at least six people

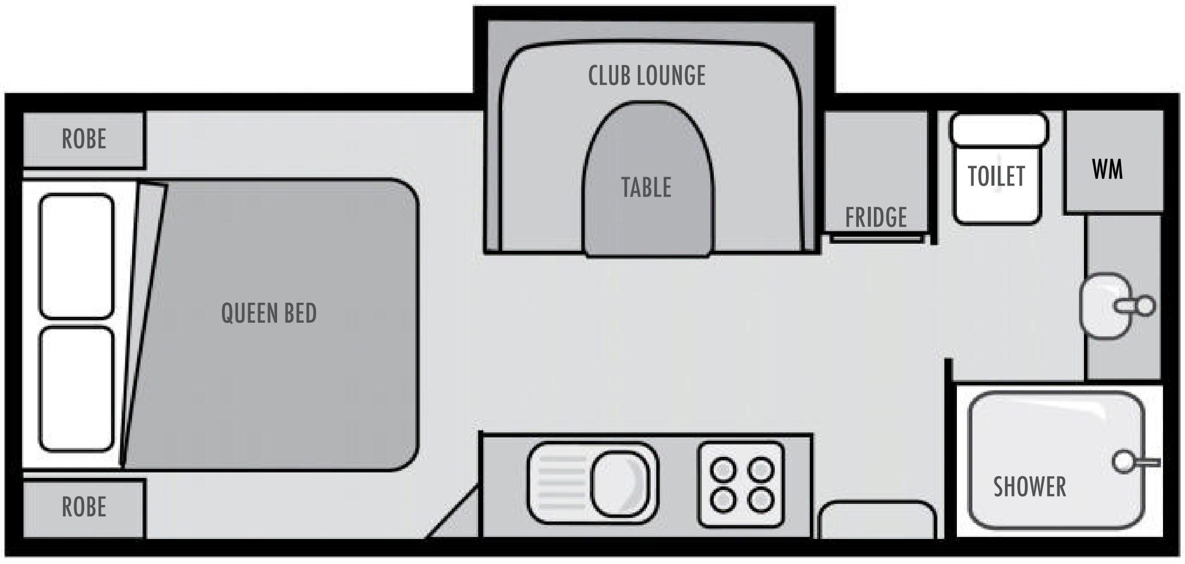
Snowy River has established itself as a mainstream caravan brand on our shores in its short five and a half years of production. It doesn't seem that long ago that we witnessed the introduction of their fledgling models, and in that time, the range has grown to 13 models between 14ft and 23ft. For anyone paying attention back then in 2016, the writing was on the wall for the local industry – here was an importer who was about to break the mould. The new company was determined to break into the local market with an innovative, quality product, and a serious backup and service supply chain.

The team behind the Snowy River brand was a captain's pick of staff from their sister company – the well-established Regent brand. They set out to bring the build, technology and equipment level the Australian public asked for. For many, the van they produced was a shock, as there was nothing unusual in the presentation, and the composite sandwich panel construction with an aluminium framed body had a level of equipment and fitout that stood it apart.

For perspective, the Snowy River brand sits proudly within the Regent RV Pty Ltd stable alongside the Regent caravan models. Long-term caravanners would certainly know that the Regent brand of caravans has been in Australia for more than 30 years.

Improvements over time delivered even more to like. Warranty was handled efficiently and without drama, and a solid independent social network was filled with praise and ideas.

When Kathleen and Darren from ABCO Caravan Services in Coffs Harbour saw Snowy growing in the local market, they knew they had to get on board. ABCO has been in the caravan servicing and sales arena for over 20 years, and it was from their dealership that we snagged a 22ft slide-out version for a review into the forest north of Coffs. Our venue was Sherwood Farm, about an hour's drive north of Coffs Harbour – a peaceful and remote holiday destination amongst a growing macadamia orchard.



MEASURING UP

PROS

- Modern Composite construction
Stylish interior
Slide out gives loads of room

CONS

- I'd like a full oven

SNOW RIVER *SLIDE-OUT*

WEIGHTS AND MEASURE
Overall length 8.53m (27ft 4in)
External body length 6.66m (20ft 8in)
External body width 2.39m (7ft 9in)
Travel height 3.22m (10ft 6in)
Tare 2527kg
ATM 3500kg
Payload 973kg (600kg standard)
Ball weight 132kg
Ball weight to tare 5.2 per cent

EXTERNAL
Frame Aluminium
Cladding Fibreglass
Chassis A-frame 6in/ Chassis 4in/ Raiser 8in
Suspension Tandem Torsion 3.5T
Coupling 50mm Ball
Wheels 235/75/R15 (Good Ride)
Water 2 x 95L
Battery 1 x 120 AGM
Solar 1 x 200W panel
Air conditioner HB3500 Houghton
Gas 2 x 9kg
Sway control Lippert(optional)

INTERNAL
Cooking MiniGrill
Fridge Dometic 173L absorption
Microwave 20L
Bathroom Ensuite
Washing machine 2.5kg Top Load
Hot water system Swift

PRICED FROM
$73,440

OPTIONS FITTED
Black Single Kitchen Bowl Oval Basin & Swivel Tap Black Kitchen & Ensuite Tapware 8823C, 2 x Sirocco Fans in Bedroom, LED Strip Light Under Kitchen, Lounge and Ensuite OHC with Dimmer Switch

PRICE AS SHOWN
$75,570

MORE INFO
ABCO Caravan Services
6 Collison Place North, Boambee Valley, NSW 2450
Ph: (02) 6651 2445
W: abcocaravans.com.au

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE The caravan comes with two 9kg gas bottles; It was a smooth tow on review day; The AL-KO suspension is neatly tucked away, offering good ground clearance

THE BUILD

Snowy River is a branch of the mammoth Daide Longtree automotive conglomerate that builds vehicles for their local market. They had the finance and engineering skills to perfect a composite wall construction that did away with timber. The company recognised that as the Australian buying public has become savvier, demand is shifting away from the traditional 'stick and tin' method.

The body is built from composite panels that are permanently bonded together to form a rigid and highly sturdy monocoque entity. The wall panels were developed by Snowy River after months of development and are made from XPS foam extruded around an internal aluminium frame compressed inside sheets of 3mm fibreglass. The roof and floor are similar composite panels, but the floor has a second layer of fibreglass underneath for added durability. The aluminium adds strength and provides fixing points for windows, doors, and internal cabinetry.

Underneath is a chassis formed from 150 x 50mm hollow steel section Duragal mainframe with a 50 x 50mm riser. Once the Duragal is

SNOWY RIVER
CARAVANS
SRC-TWENTY TWOS

> "The company recognised that as the Australian buying public ***has become savvier, demand has shifted away from the traditional 'stick and tin' method***"

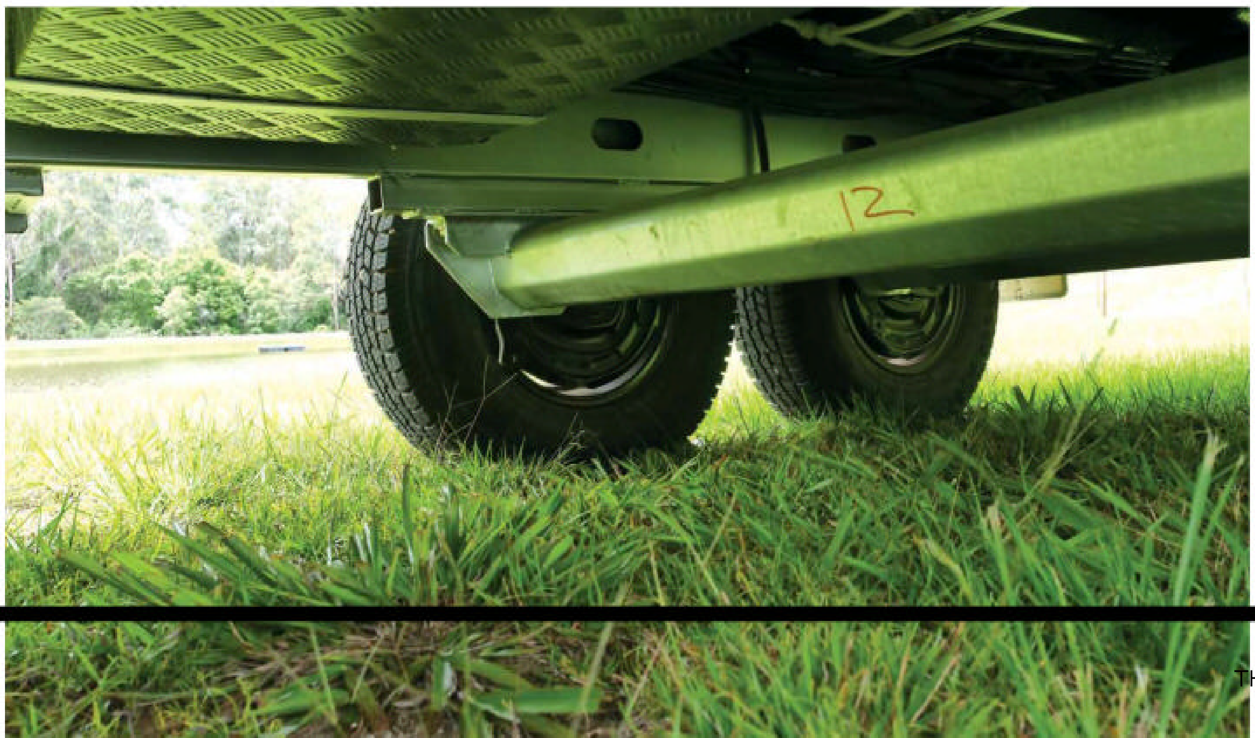
welded, it is finished with high zinc-rich paint for added protection. Finally, the sections are stitch-welded together to form a sturdy, laminated 200 x 50mm (8 x 2in) structure riding on tandem AL-KO independent rubber torsion suspension.

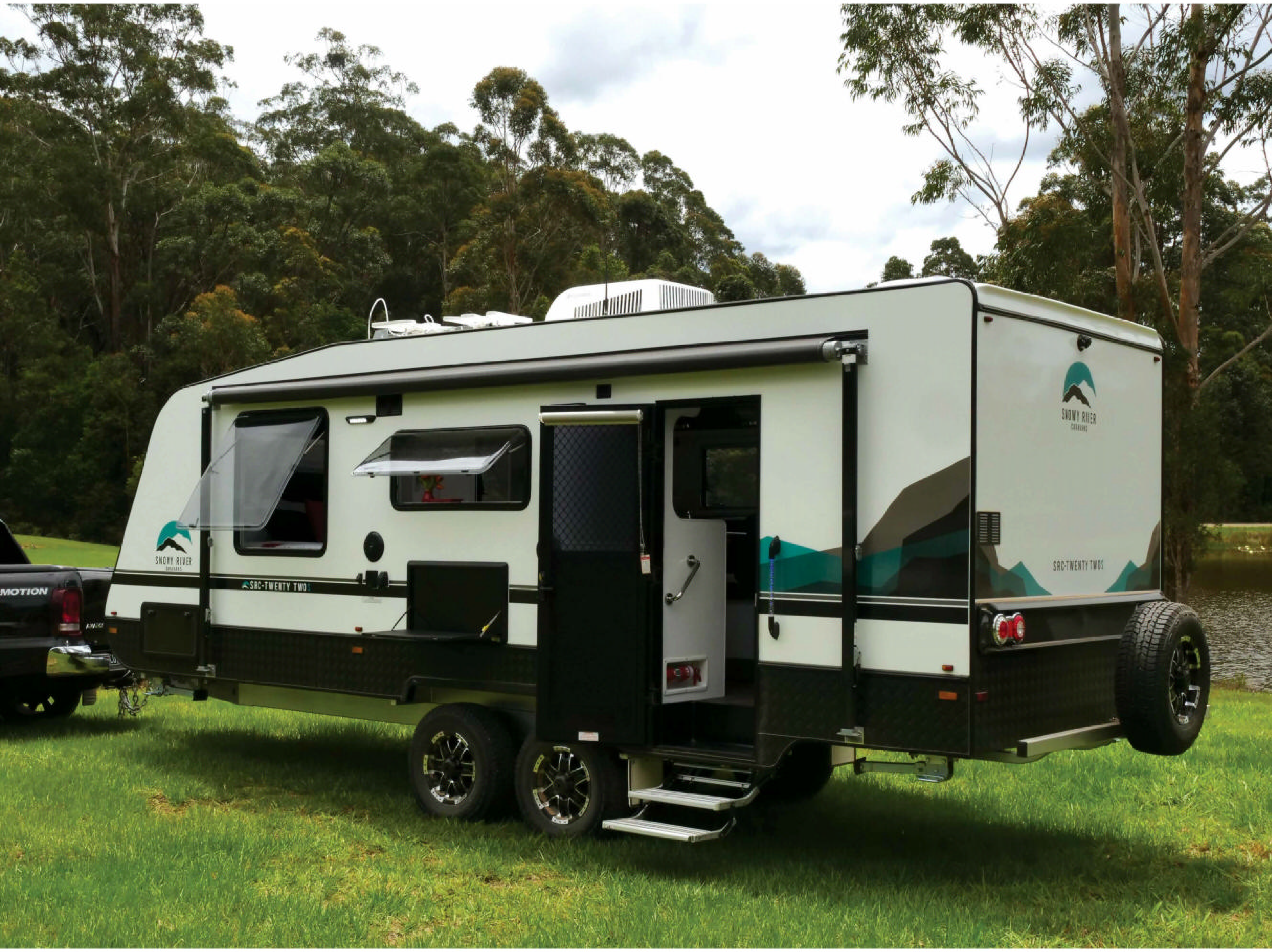
For those not familiar with this suspension, it employs a triangular torque rod and three rubber blocks inside a hexagonal metal tube. The rod is attached to a trailing arm on which the wheel is mounted through a stub axle. As the van moves over the road, the wheel movement causes the trailing arm to compress against the rubber blocks, offering resistance and providing dampening of the ride. The system is simple, durable and lightweight, with the added advantage of requiring little maintenance. The only downside is that it can be challenging to repair if damaged in an accident.

The AL-KO system is ideally suited to the sort of dirt road travel you would experience on a lap of the country or the tracks leading to the Birdsville races. Owners of vans like Airstream in the USA and Jurgens in South Africa have tested this system in some horrendous conditions.

There's an option for independent Tuff-Ride trailing arm suspension with EFS shocks if you seek a more rugged destination.

If you are the sort of curious type that might crawl around under a van, the AL-KO suspension is surprisingly simple-looking and offers good ground clearance with very little to hang up on any rocks or uneven ground. Two 95L water tanks are shielded with checkerplate panels, and much of the electrical and other lines are routed through the chassis for protection.





THE EXTERIOR

The white of the review van now borders on the retro, but in my view, it's a look that never goes out of style – other colour options for the glossy fibreglass include grey and mocha. All vans get the standard treatment of a low panel of checkerplate, even though I think that this is probably more for show in a semi-offroad van. The overall look is modern and streamlined with a side stripe, and stylised mountain graphics and a body that rides high with plenty of chassis on show from the sides. Needless to say, the smooth fibreglass exterior should be easy to keep clean and should retain its lustre for many years.

Because Snowy River fits the semi-offroad category and it's designed for limited rough road travel, the basic 50mm ball hitch is a suitable connection. Two gas bottles sit on the A-frame ahead of a broad and deep front boot, and there's an option for a stone guard if you are likely to hit the dirt regularly. The front window gets an aluminium cover, and lower down are the obligatory grab handles – these are a quirky ADR requirement, but good luck moving the van with them.

As well as the front boot, there is more storage in a full-width tunnel hatch towards the front. At the same time, along the passenger side, we see the usual assortment of a picnic table, electrical power points, full-length awning, external speakers and overhead LED lights. Wheels are upmarket-style black 15in alloy rims shod with 235 x 75 tyres. The rear end has the minimalist treatment of a single spare on a narrow bar, but a rear-view camera is standard.

The high van needs a twin fold-out step for climbing aboard, and there's a classy looking acrylic grab rail with light to assist your ascent.

THE INTERIOR

Once aboard, the Snowy River impresses with a well-lit and bright interior finished in contrasting black against a white colour scheme that is right on trend right now. ABCO had decorated the van for us with soft furnishings that added splashes of red for a decidedly cheery effect. A floor to ceiling storage unit to the right at the entry takes advantage of a space a lot of builders ignore, and it would make an ideal pantry for long trips away.

At 22ft long, this is a big van in today's market, and that feeling of roominess comes through on first impression. But, of course, there's more. After making sure there's room to extend the slide-out without hitting anything, with the club lounge moved to its open position, it adds even more room to spread out. The table swivels for easy entry, and there is storage in overhead cupboards and under the seat squabs.

ABCO CARAVAN

ABCO Caravan services began over 20 years ago as one of the first purpose-built caravan and motorhome workshops in New South Wales and has grown into one of the largest and most professional in the country. Owned and managed by husband and wife team, Kathleen and Darren Saward (right), they now have a staff of 17 across all aspects of caravan repair, modification, maintenance and sales. Service is carried out in a huge purpose built six-bay facility on the 2700sqm site in Coffs Harbour's industrial area at Boambee Valley. They help to keep more than 1000 caravans and motorhomes on the road each year.

There's an impressive range and quality choices in the well-stocked parts and accessories department, from nuts and bolts to state of the art solar systems. You can also expect to receive good old-fashioned advice. As Kathleen told me, "You may not walk in already knowing exactly what caravan parts you may need, so we will help you make the right choice and even fit it for you. In essence, we have a 'do it right first time' approach." After all, there's not always going to be a quality caravan spares and accessories shop around every corner on your travels.

There's also a separate undercover showroom for new Snowy River and Bushtracker Caravans. ABCO is Bushtracker's only dealer in Australia. ABCO Caravan Services also undertake insurance work and are the preferred repairers of all major manufacturers and insurance providers.

REAL CAR
HE OUTBACK
ABCO CARAVANS
ABCO CARAVANS

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE There are many storage options internally and externally; The exterior of the van was a retro white and bit different from current crowds; Soft, red furnishings gave the caravan a bright appearance

RATINGS

VALUE FOR MONEY

★★★★★★★★★☆

"That's a lot of caravan and engineering for the price."

TOWABILITY

★★★★★★★★☆☆

"Needs some weight upfront, but it tows well."

SUITABILITY FOR INTENDED TOURING

★★★★★★★★☆☆

"Plenty of comfort and technology."

BUILD QUALITY

★★★★★★★★☆☆

"Has a modern well-finished appeal."

LIVEABILITY

★★★★★★★★★☆

"An entire oven and a bigger fridge would be perfect."

CUSTOMER CARE

★★★★★★★★★☆

"The company and ABCO know how to look after their clients."

SELF-SUFFICIENCY

★★★★★★★⯨☆☆

"Another panel and battery would be better."

INNOVATION

★★★★★★★★★☆

"It's the technology the buying public is asking for."

X-FACTOR

★★★★★★★★☆☆

"Not showy, but it's a winner for those in the know."

The U-shaped lounge is the centrepiece of the Snowy 22S, and it changes the whole complexion of caravan living. There's comfortable seating for half a dozen around the Laminex table, and with extra windows in the slide-out section, the views are expansive for everyone. The black leather lounges – a standard feature in the slide outs – are well-padded and have good back support. You might note in the images that the side windows don't open. This is because an open window will be damaged if you are a bit forgetful.

Opposite the dining area is a decent-sized kitchen with a mini grill, matte black sink and tap, and a high microwave. But the advantage of a longer van is the metre or so of bench space and the great storage options in overhead cupboards, a plethora of drawers, and a pull-out pantry under the bench. The 173L absorption fridge is opposite the entry and is neatly encased in a cabinet with drawers top and bottom.

Most owners will like that the bed is well away from the entry for the maximum privacy this layout affords, and a black leather bedhead adds more class to what's already a classy act. Access to the island bed is excellent, and there is loads of light and ventilation from a roof hatch, windows with quality screens, and block-outs on each side and at the head. Storage is equally split between the couple to avoid blues, with a double cupboard overhead and deep hanging cupboards on each side.

In a van like this Snowy River, where you are chasing upscale amenities and some extra comfort, you can properly expect the ensuite will be a cut above. It won't disappoint with an ample drying-off area and a spacious moulded shower. The black circular bowl floating on the vanity completes the trendy décor, and there's a top load washer as standard.

SELF-SUFFICIENCY

A single 200W solar panel hooks to a 120Ah battery, so you will get away with a few days off-grid if you need to. Like most Snowy River vans, the 22S has a second battery box fitted on the chassis for an easy upgrade if you want to self-isolate for longer. Two 95L water tanks will suit the purpose, and there are readouts at the end of the kitchen for all water and battery levels.

THE DRIVE

The review van weighs in with a 2327kg tare with an upgraded ATM of 3500kg, so the payload is a very generous 973kg. (A 600kg payload and a 2900kg ATM is standard.) With this sort of upgraded capacity, Snowy River signals that this is a van you will load up with all types of gear for a long run.

Hooked up to a V6 Amarok, we ran the van at highway speeds and along several kilometres of forestry roads and across rough farmland, and it handled everything with ease. It did experience a bit of a wander at higher speeds, which we later put down to being empty. A bit of weight up front would help as the ball/tare ratio is lower than the average scale.

Depending on how you load the Snowy River, most dual-cabs will be fine, but if you plan to fill it up to the max, it would be better suited to a LandCruiser or similar.

SNOWY RIVER
SRC-TWENTY TWO

CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT The layout makes good use of space; Storage can be found on both sides of the bed; The caravan is high-quality and built to last

WARRANTY

Warranty is a 2-year manufacturer and 5-year structural, which is pretty good in terms of Australian Consumer Law. From all accounts, any warranty issues are handled efficiently both at a factory and dealer level, especially given ABCO lives on its excellent reputation.

THE WRAP

I have been a fan of the Snowy River from the first van we reviewed, and the admiration has not waned. The big slide-out is very well priced at $75,570, with extras like Sirocco fans, strip lights in the kitchen, and dimmer lights. It has the equipment level and electrical appliances you would expect in a high-end van and wins with the excellent build quality of its composite body.

Words *Anji Bignell* *Pics* *Supplied*

ENERGY BOOSTERS

These breakfast recipes pack a protein punch while keeping you sustained all day

RICOTTA AND PEACH TOAST

TOTAL TIME: 15 mins **SERVES:** 4

INGREDIENTS

- 3 tbsp mixed sunflower seeds, cashews and pine nuts
- 4 pieces of multigrain or sourdough toast
- ¾ cup ricotta cheese
- 1 ripe peach, pitted and sliced
- 2 tsp honey
- ¼ tsp salt

METHOD

Toast seeds and nuts over a dry skillet, tossing frequently, around 3 minutes. Leave aside to cool.

Toast the bread. Spread around 3 tablespoons of ricotta on each piece, then arrange 3 to 4 pieces of peach slices on top of each piece of toast. Drizzle each piece with ½ teaspoon of honey and sprinkle each piece with 2 teaspoons of seeds/nuts and sprinkle with salt.

Serve with eggs, avocado and toast, or just by itself.

BREKKY HASHBROWNS

TOTAL TIME: 30 minutes **SERVES:** 4

INGREDIENTS

- 2 large Russet potatoes
- 1 tsp salt
- ½ tsp garlic powder
- ½ tsp onion powder
- ¼ cup extra virgin olive oil

METHOD

Scrub, clean, and grate the potatoes (you can leave the skin on or peel them).

In a sieve, rinse the grated potato under water until it runs clear.

Drain the potatoes and place them on a tea towel or paper towels and remove as much moisture as possible.

Transfer the potato to a bowl and mix in the salt, garlic and onion powder.

Heat the oil in a large skillet until a piece of grated potato sizzles on contact.

Spread the potato across the skillet in an even layer and press down. Cook for around 2 minutes.

Stir again, press down and let cook for a further 2 minutes. Flip sections and cook until crispy.

Transfer to paper towels to absorb the oil and serve with eggs, avocado, and bacon, or eat on their own.

COCONUT ENERGY BITES

TOTAL TIME: 15 minutes
SERVES: 24 balls

INGREDIENTS

- 2 cups unsweetened shredded coconut plus more for dusting
- 2 tbsp honey or maple syrup
- 3 tbsp coconut oil
- 1 tsp vanilla extract

METHOD

Process shredded coconut in a food processor until wet and dense (best to make this prior to your road trip).

Transfer to a bowl and add the rest of the ingredients, mixing well.

Form bite size balls with your hands and roll in shredded coconut. Place in the fridge for a few hours and store in a large container for offroad snacks.

Words *Wine Chick* **Pics** *Anna Shepherd OR supplied* **Insta** *@wine_chick_* **Facebook** *@winechickthoughts*

WINE HUNTING IN THE HUNTER

Summer is in full swing and the sun is out — what a perfect time to visit a wine region!

If you're a Sydneysider, a summer trip to the Hunter Valley is a must. Only a two-hour drive and you are well and truly immersed into the rolling hills of the Brokenback Ranges, breathing in the fresh country air and indulging your visual senses. The drive from Sydney to the Hunter is enjoyable, with ever-changing scenery of rolling hills and ocean views. As you cross the bridges at Hawkesbury River, the busy city is left well behind, and the picture-perfect landscape is pre-empting a glorious weekend in the wine country. Once off the M1, the scenery changes once more, and you enter the windy road that leads through sections of bush and rainforest, before opening up to beautiful hills and vineyards as you reach Cessnock.

The Hunter Valley is the oldest wine region in Australia, with first grapes planted in the early 1830s. It is home to some of the best semillon in the country, closely followed by verdelho, chardonnay and shiraz. Like any wine region, it offers a vast range of altitudes, which, paired with varied soil compositions across the region, provides plenty of vineyard diversity.

TYRRELL'S
Mother's Shiraz
TYRRELL'S
Stevens Shiraz

TYRRELL'S
CELLAR DOOR
SALES & TASTING
WINERY TOURS

If you're like me and like to start your wine trip with a good view of the surroundings, Audrey Wilkinson is hard to beat. With their cellar door perched right atop a hill or the surrounding Broken Back Ranges it has views in every direction and provides a good outlook of the valley. Their wines are great, offering a great overview of what the region is about and there are ranges to try, depending on your tastes and preferences. Once piece of advice, book ahead, as they do get really busy.

From Audrey's, I make my way down to Tyrrells, which is definitely a must. The Tyrrells family history in the region dates back to the 1800s, and having the luxury of owning several vineyards in the area, Tyrrells provides some great examples of the effects local terroir has on the characteristics of the wines. One of the highlights for me was back-to-back tasting of semillon and shirazes from vineyards with slightly different soil compositions. For an even greater effect, Tyrrells has collected soils from each vineyard that are available to smell alongside the wines, providing an even more immersive experience and really challenges the senses to deeper understanding of the winemaking craft. Quality wine is made in the vineyard, they say, and it really is evident when you observe the soil characteristics and smells carried forward into your glass of wine.

Once the hunger kicks in, the Hunter spoils for choice. There are restaurants to suit most preferences and budgets. I always look for a winery restaurant so I can combine wine tasting and dining without having to drive between two locations. So with the senses well-tuned, we head over to one of my favourites – Leogate. Not only do they offer award winning wines and sell out of Semillon vintages year after year, it is also a venue with an amazing fine dining experience, courtesy to The Gates restaurant on site. Having developed quite a reputation in the Valley and picked up multiple awards, this place is not to be missed if you're a foodie. Serving both lunch and dinner, it's easy to work into any itinerary – either as a stopover in the middle of the day, or for a great end-of-trip finale.

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Audrey Wilkinson is a classic cellar in this region; Cheers to the beautiful Hunter Valley; Tyrell's is an essential stopover for any wine aficionado; Soil has been collected from each vineyard at Tyrell's that are available to smell alongside the wines

UP TO TASTE!

IRONGATE ESTATE 2019 PRIMERA SEMILLON ($25)

Being a white that can be aged, 2019 is quite a young vintage for semillon, which is apparent by its emerald-green colour. It's light colour perfectly harmonises with lifted aromas of lemongrass and ginger spice, passionfruit, and lime zest. It stays consistent on your palate — ripe lemon walks a gentle line and provides support to notes of pear, stone fruit, and beeswax.

LEOGATE ESTATE 2020 BROKENBACK VERDELHO ($22)

Bright lemon yellow colour is very vibrant and inviting — this is a great fresh but complex white to lift up the mood. Fresh aromas of white peaches and melon define your experience from the very start, and you know you're in for a treat. The palate is equally as fruitful with notes of melon, passionfruit, lemongrass, and a lime zesty finish to top things off. A great starter for a weekend lunch!

AUDREY WILKINSON 2019 WINEMAKER'S SELECTION HUNTER CHARDONNAY ($35)

Light aromas of nectarine, ripe pear and morning toast set the scene. On the palate, green apple and lemon bounce off one another and eventually give way to creamy mouthfeel and long finish. This is an excellent food wine.

HUNGERFORD HILL 2020 CLASSIC ROSE HUNTER VALLEY ($27)

From the second this wine hits your glass, the aromas of black raspberry and dark cherry, supported by the lifted scent of rose petals start to tickle your senses. Refreshing and fruit driven start to your tasting experience develops into savoury and creamy mid-palate for a split second to let you taste the food you are enjoying with this wine, then swiftly changes to red apple and crisp finish neutralising the palate.

TYRRELL'S 2017 MOTHER'S SHIRAZ ($40)

This wine was one of my highlights. The brick-red appearance speaks for a little bit of age in the wine and the aromas of juicy fruit and subtle oak work so well together. On the palate you get a perfect balance of power and elegance. In the red corner you have ripe red fruit, in the blue corner — silky but persistent tannin structure; when the two meet a true equilibrium is achieved.

KITCHEN SINK REFRESH

We caught up with Andrew Phillips and the team from The RV Repair Centre to give us the run down on refreshing a kitchen sink

Words and Pics John Hughes

To state the obvious, your kitchen sink has water coming in and going out from various plumbing fittings. All these fittings have seals to make sure water goes where it is supposed to. If you ignore these seals, eventually they will leak and cause problems but fortunately it's pretty simple to replace the seals. In this article we will look at the hand pump and the waste outlet. Depending on what has failed, you could just replace the seals or alternatively, the complete assemblies.

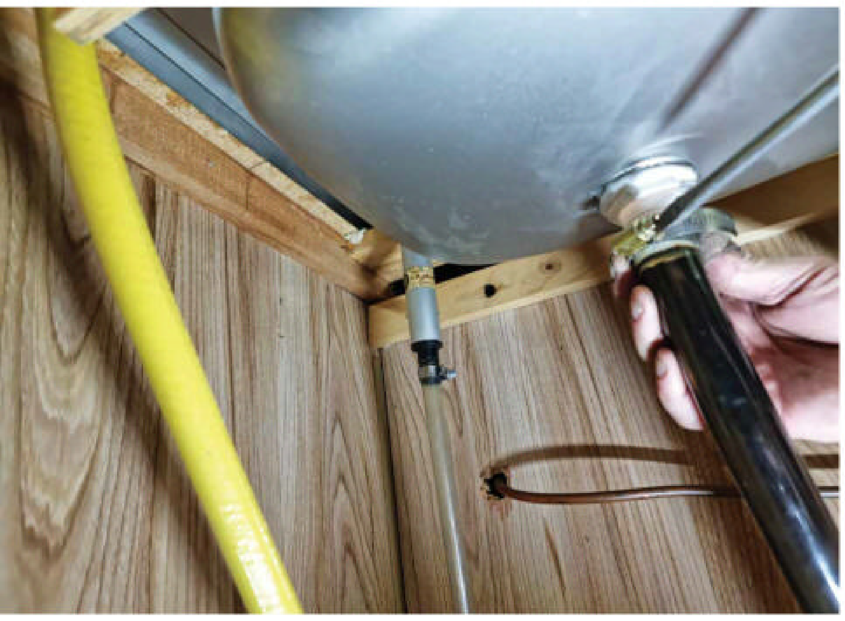
WASTE OUTLET

The waste outlet has a simple seal where it makes contact with the sink. If this fails, wastewater will drip underneath the sink into your cupboard, causing water damage and unpleasant smells. To replace the seal, the waste outlet needs to be removed with a couple of basic hand tools.

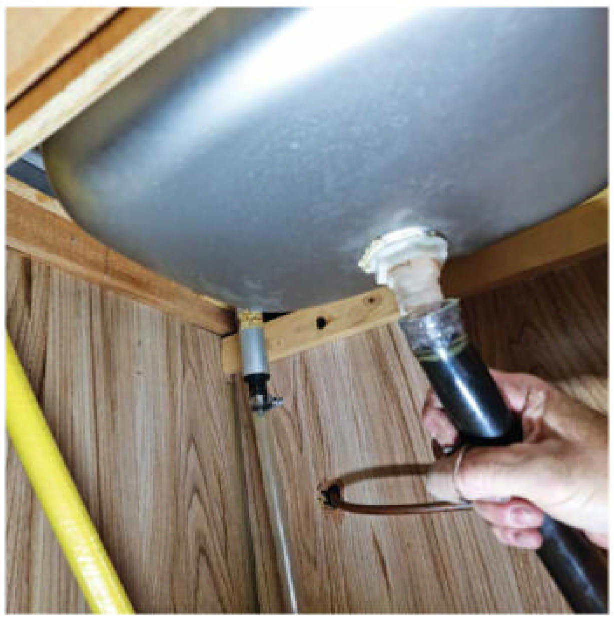
You could also follow this process if your waste outlet looks brittle or discoloured or if you have lost your plug and can't find a replacement plug to fit. To ensure your replacement waste outlet will be suitable you just need to check: 1. The waste outlet sealing flange and male threaded part are suitable diameter for the hole in your sink and 2. The male hose barb is the right diameter for the waste outlet hose.

The waste outlet is sealed to the sink with a film of silicone rather than a rubber washer. You will need neutral cure silicone which will create a seal but won't adhere so strongly that you can't remove it later on.

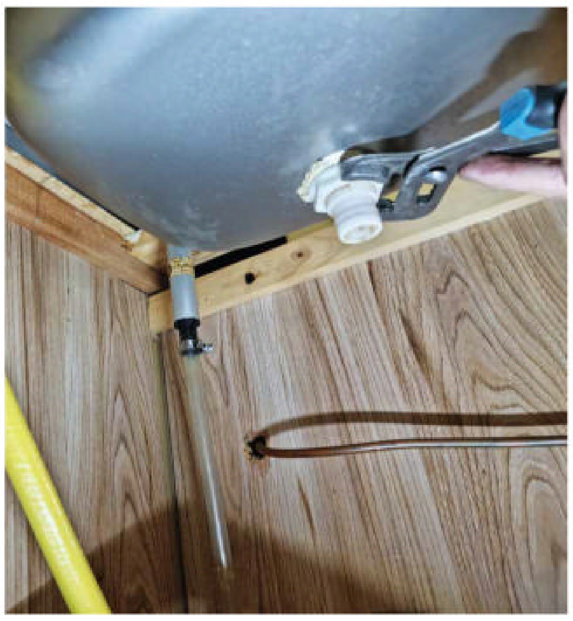
The steps are as follows:



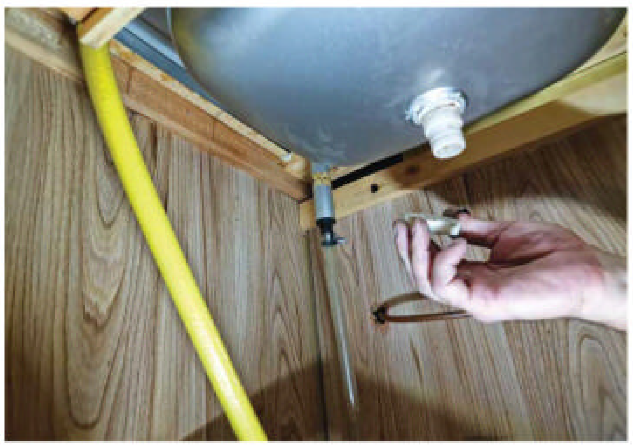
1. Undo the hose clamp securing the drain hose to the waste outlet hose barb.



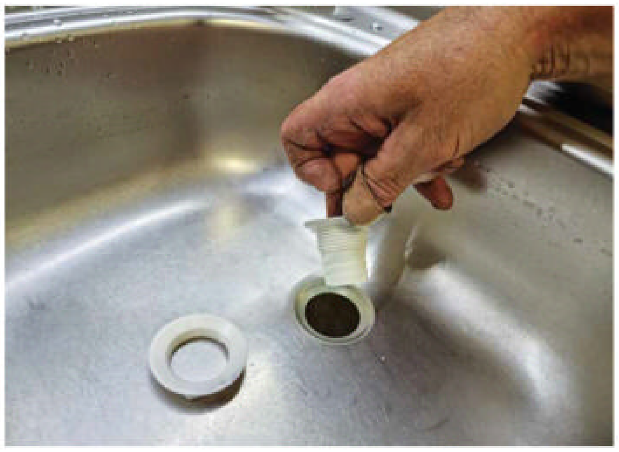
2. Remove the waste hose from the waste outlet.



3. Undo the nut retaining the waste outlet to the sink



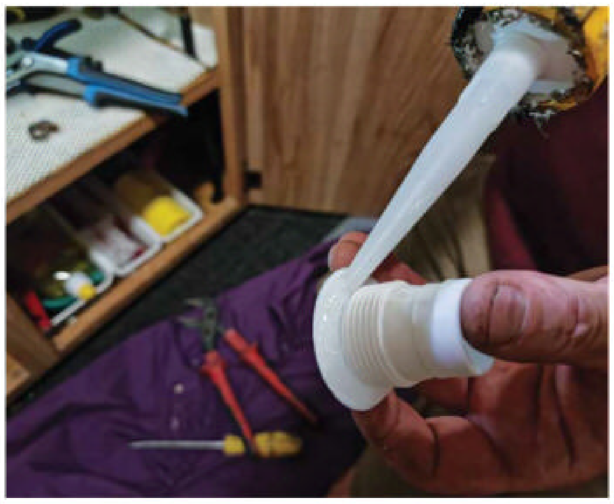
4. Remove the retaining nut.



5. Remove the waste outlet from the sink

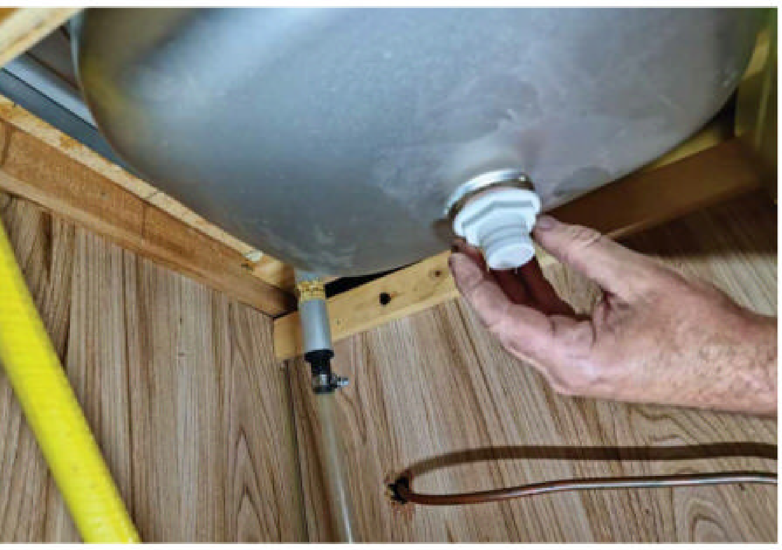
6. Clean the sink with methylated spirits to ensure good silicone adhesion.

7. Wipe dry thoroughly with a clean cloth.

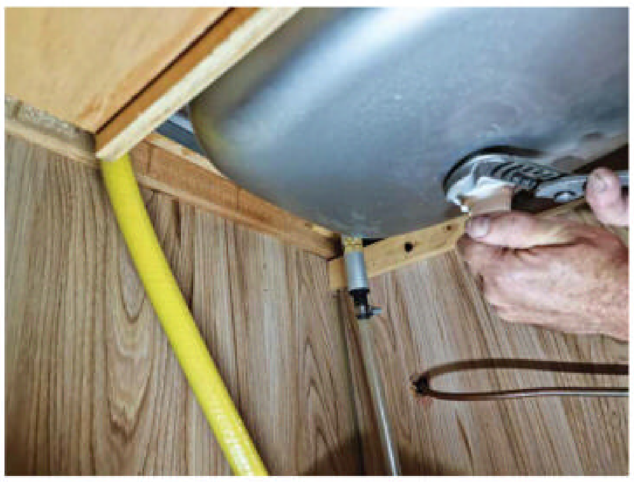


8. Apply neutral cure silicone to the underside of the waste outlet flange.

9. Replace the waste outlet into the sink opening avoiding smearing silicone.



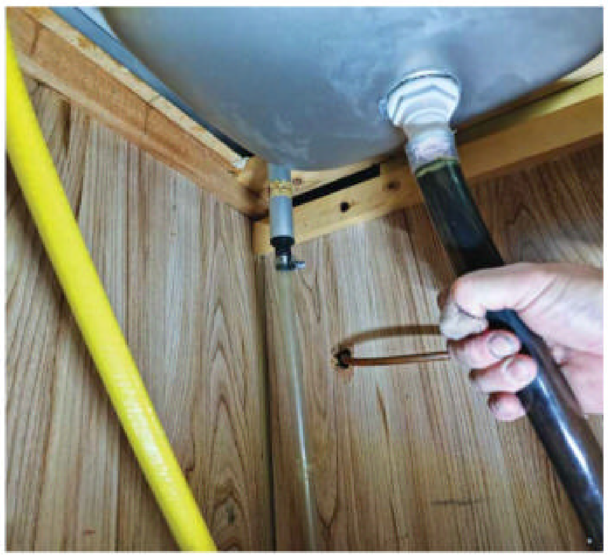
10. Refit the retaining nut.



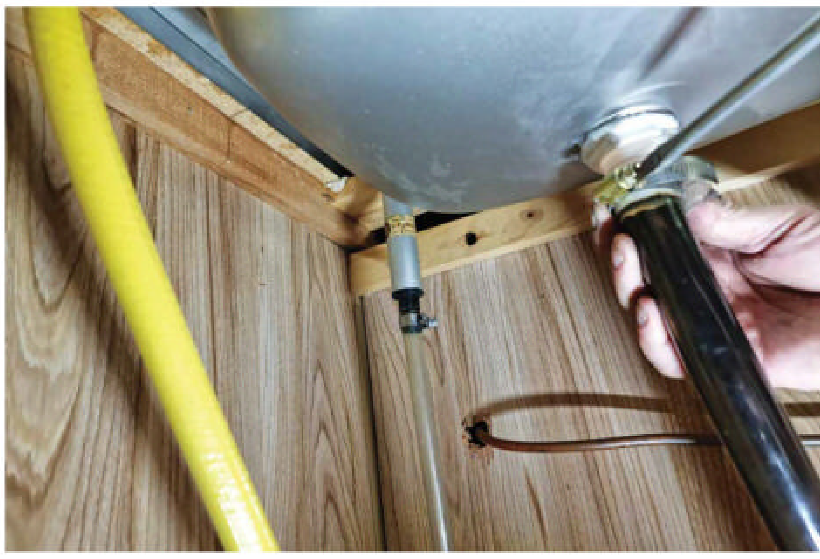
11. Gently tighten the retaining nut to avoid squeezing all the silicone out between the waste outlet flange and sink.

12. Wipe away excess silicone.

13. Do a final clean with a rag.



14. Reattach the waste hose.



15. Tighten the hose clamp.

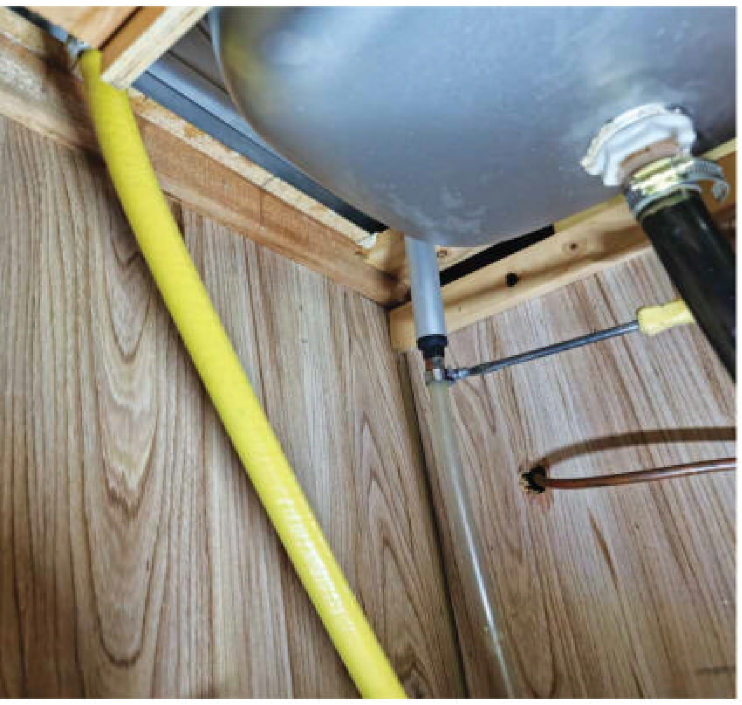
HAND PUMP

You can tell your hand pump washers need replacing if you experience the following: 1. Water leaks from the pump shaft or 2. The hand pump fails to push an adequate flow of water.

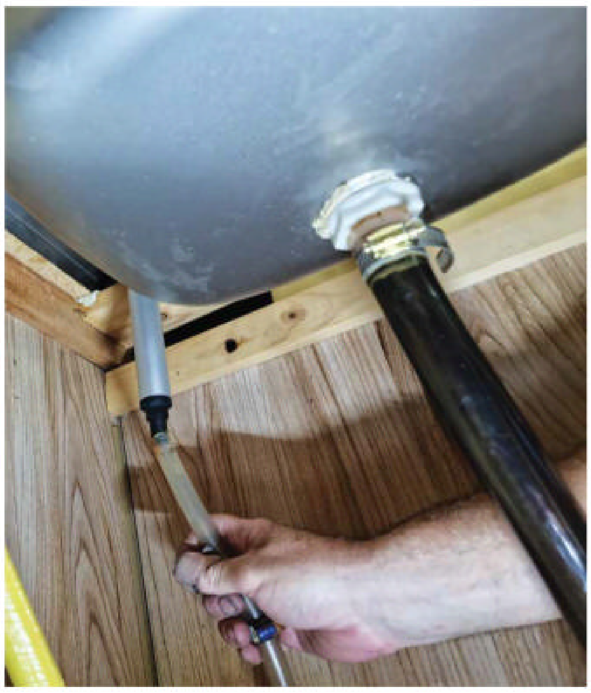
The fix can often be achieved by replacing the washers, which can be purchased as a kit. Refer to picture six showing the lower washer which creates the seal to pump the water and the upper washer which creates the seal, so water doesn't leak out of the shaft. Alternatively, the complete hand pump assembly can be replaced.

To ensure your replacement hand pump will be suitable, check: 1. The hand pump sealing flange and male threaded part are a suitable diameter for the sink hole and 2. The male hose barb is the right diameter for the hand pump inlet hose.

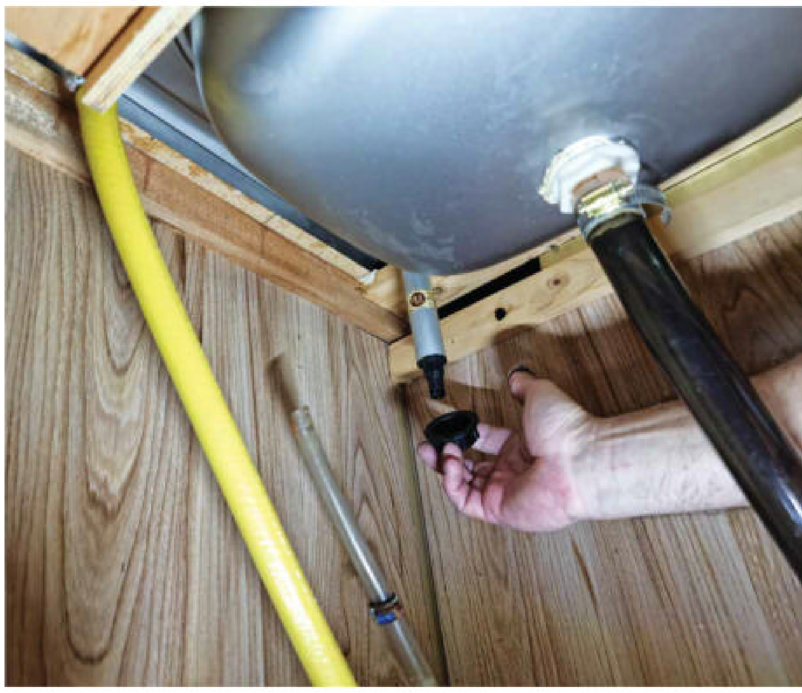
The steps are as follows – if you choose to replace the whole assembly, skip steps 5-11.



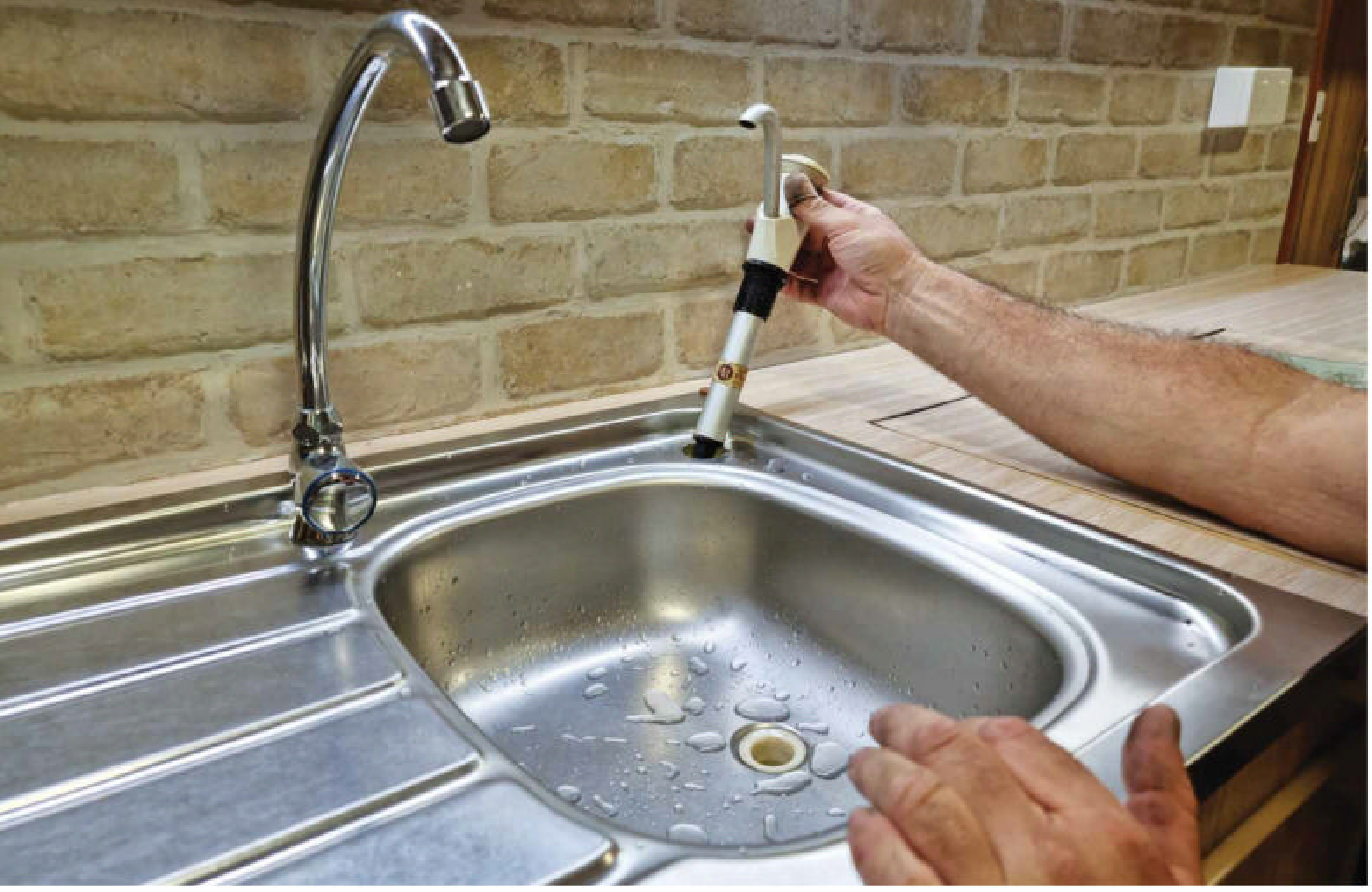
1. Undo the hose clamp securing the inlet hose to the hand pump barb.



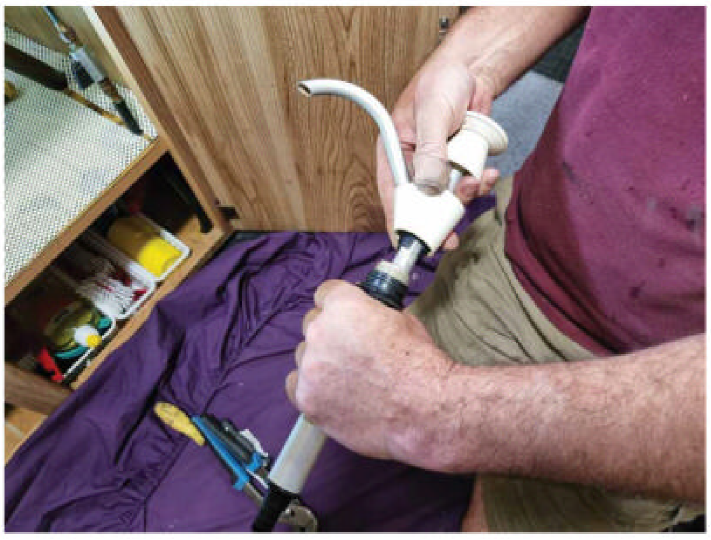
2. Remove the inlet hose from the hand pump.



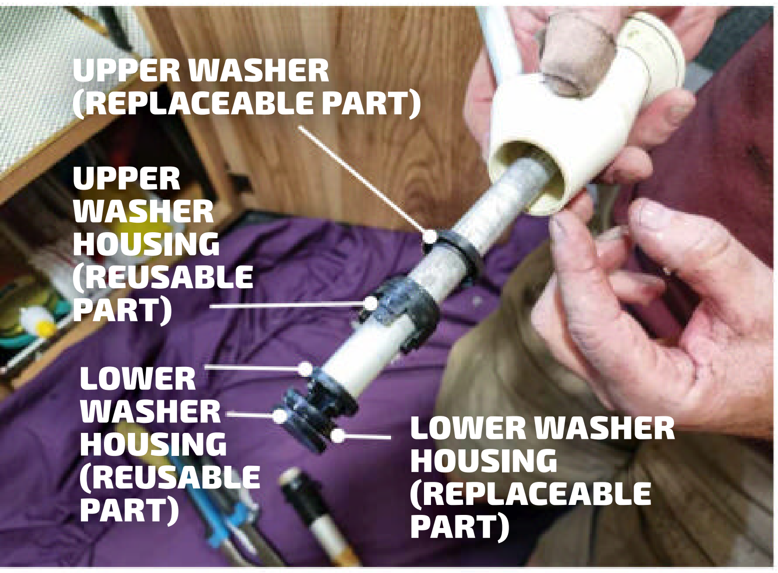
3. Loosen and remove the hand pump retaining nut.



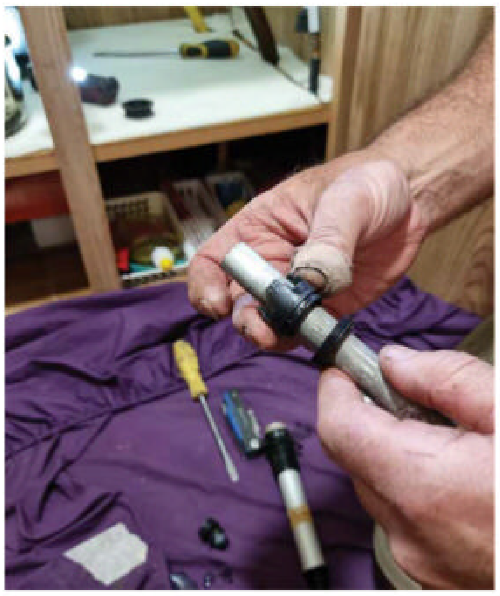
4. Remove the hand pump.



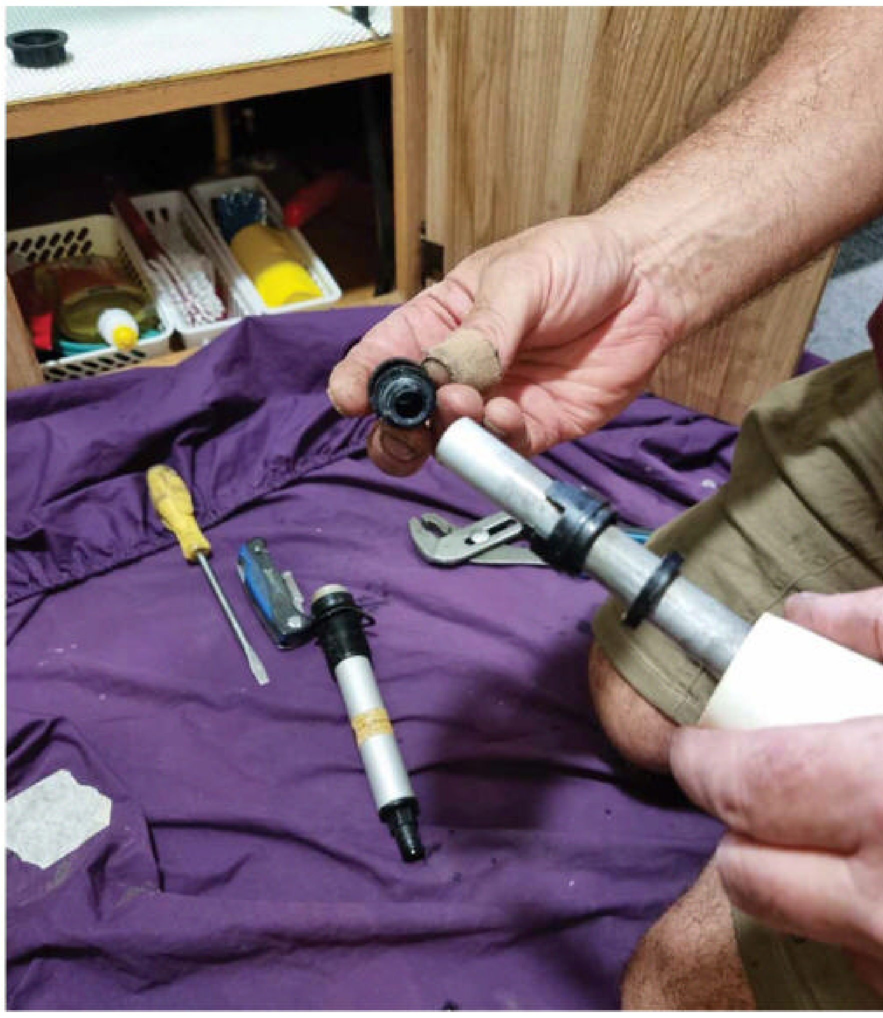
5. Remove the top half of the pump from the shaft by pulling. This is a press fit and a fair bit of force is required to release it.


UPPER WASHER (REPLACEABLE PART)
UPPER WASHER HOUSING (REUSABLE PART)
LOWER WASHER HOUSING (REUSABLE PART)
LOWER WASHER HOUSING (REPLACEABLE PART)

6. Identify the washers to replace.



7. Remove the lower washer from the lower washer housing with a pair of pliers.



8. Unscrew the lower washer housing from the shaft.

9. Slide off the top washer housing and top washer. Then clean the shaft with a rag.

10. Install new washers and original housings, ensuring they are oriented as you found them.

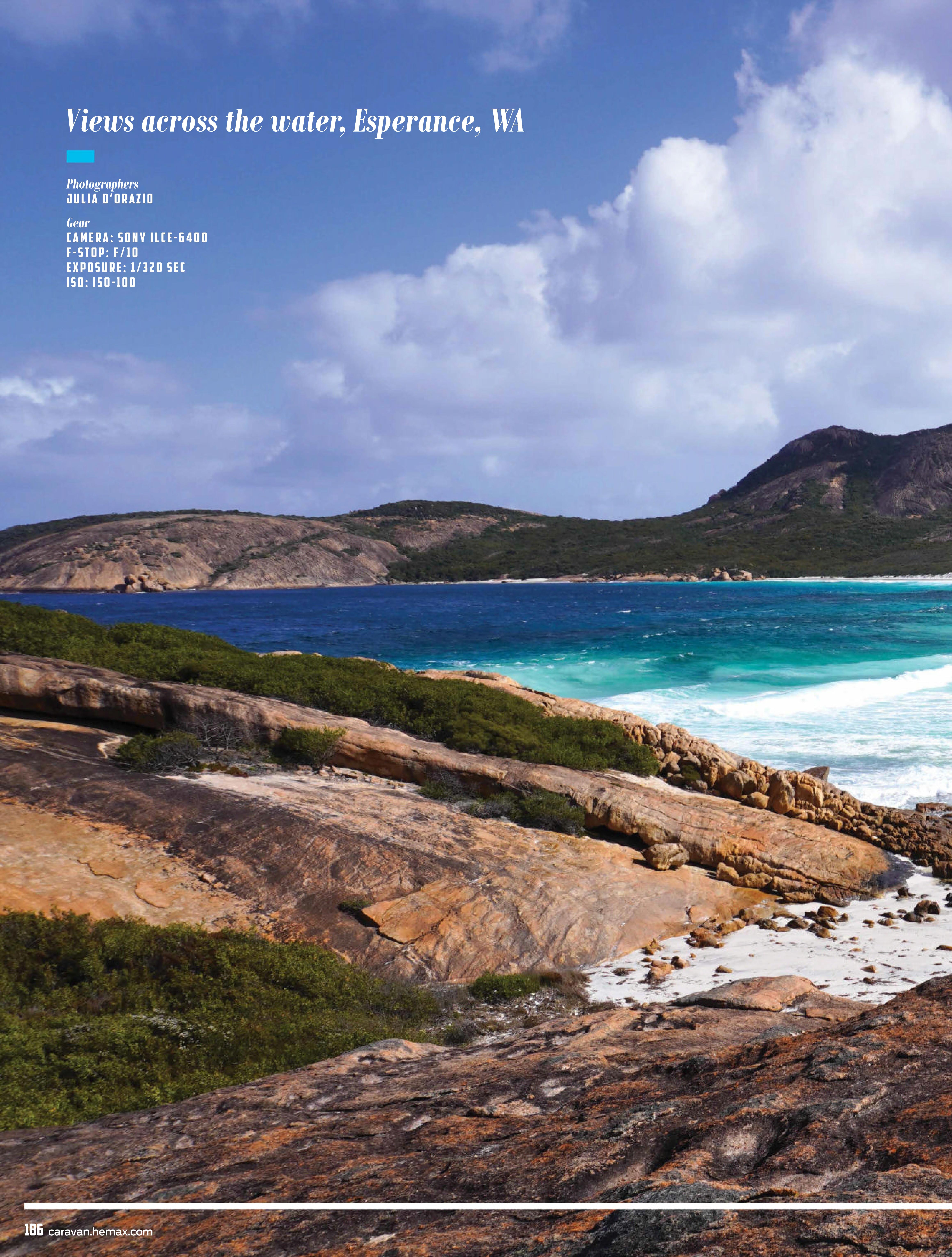
11. Reassemble the pump assembly by pushing the top and bottom half together firmly.

12. Reinstall the pump assembly to the sink in reverse order.

IF IN DOUBT, CONSULT A PROFESSIONAL

Improper maintenance could lead to injury, death or property damage. Maintenance work of this nature should only be undertaken by persons with suitable mechanical competence. Information provided is general in nature and can only be taken as a guide. Individual discretion must be exercised and persons undertaking described tasks do so completely at their own risk. Publishers and creators of this content accept no responsibility for loss or damage.

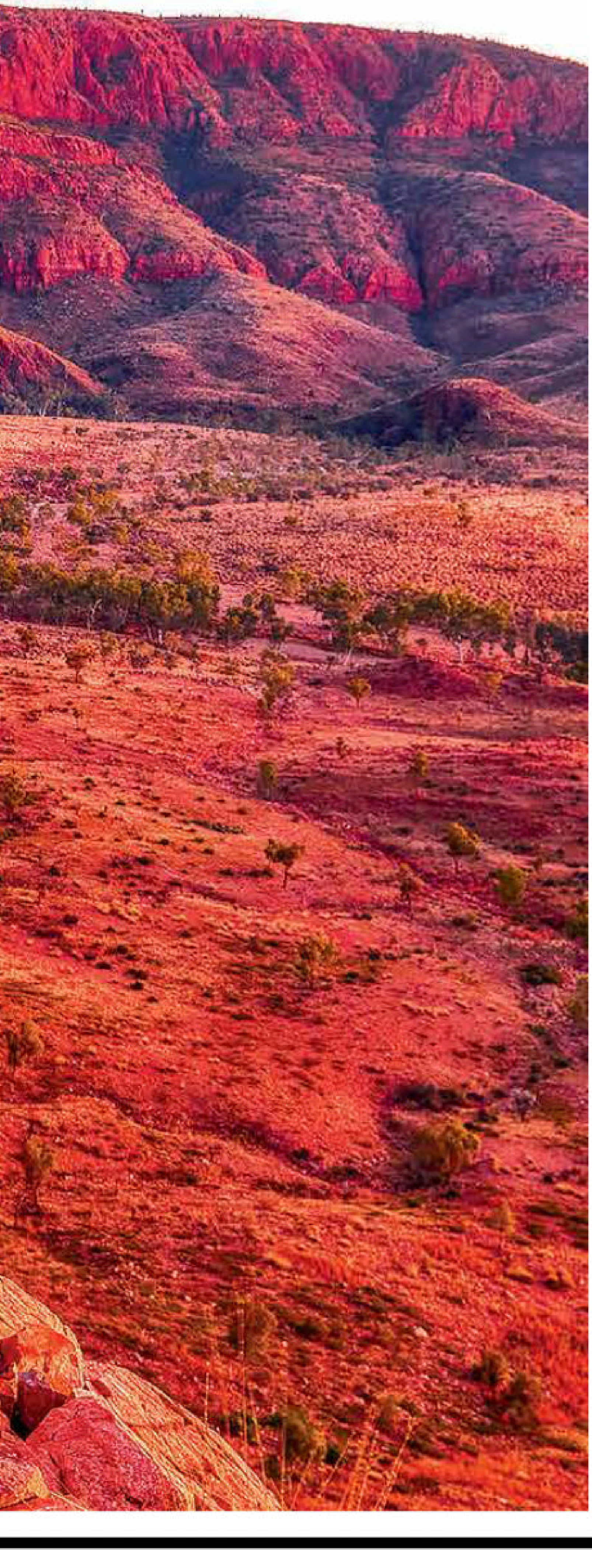
Thanks to Andrew Phillips and the team from the RV Repair Centre, 120 Canterbury Rd Bayswater Nth Vic 3151, Ph: (03) 9761 4189.



Views across the water, Esperance, WA

Photographers
JULIA D'ORAZIO

Gear
CAMERA: SONY ILCE-6400
F-STOP: F/10
EXPOSURE: 1/320 SEC
ISO: ISO-100



AUSTRALIA A PHOTOGRAPHIC JOURNEY

Reviewed by John Ford

Reading through Scott Leggo's resume, you'd be forgiven for concluding he deserved a rest after a life spent in the Air Force, and then as an Australian diplomat and advisor on strategies to the government — both of those sound like a full career in and of themselves.

But instead, Leggo set out to establish himself as a professional photographer presenting the Australian landscape in a new light. Along the way he has won numerous awards and has become an Australian Institute of Professional Photographers Master of Photography.

Finding a new way to view Australia's landscape isn't all that easy. Hundreds of pros and thousands of weekend photographers criss-cross the countryside every year, and there have been many books trying to capture the essence of country. But, not many succeed in the way Leggo has done with his new and stunningly beautiful, large format hardback publication, Australia: A Photographic Journey released in late 2021.

Across 246 pages, Leggo takes us on a journey through the themes of Coast, Country, Outback, Waterways, Snow and Mountains, and Forests. The collection was shot over fifteen years, and Scott found his way to iconic locations and hidden corners all over the continent. Every image shows a dedication to the photographic art form that's both fresh and evocative. Many of the 200 photos have such depth they are almost third dimensional.

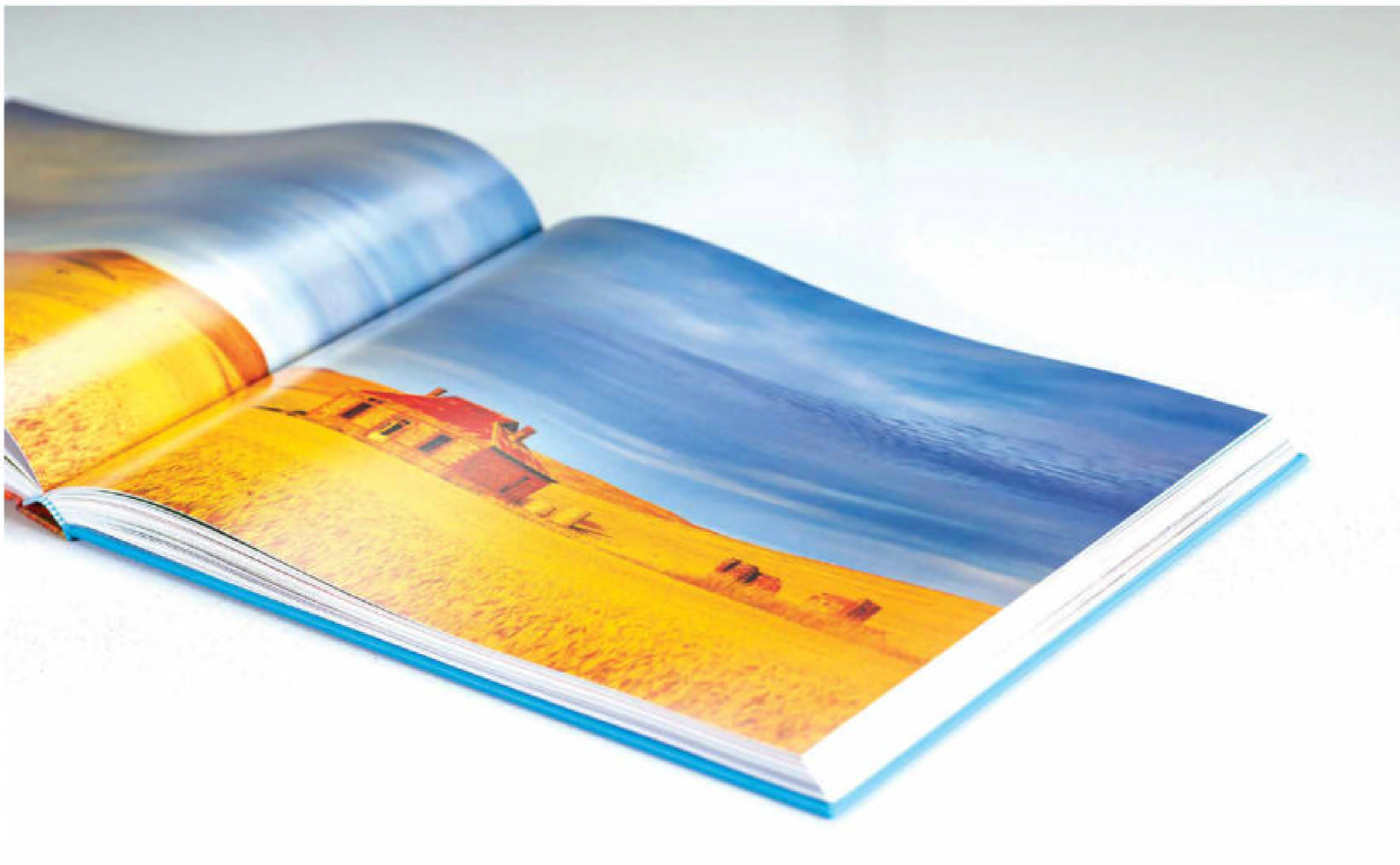
I found images like Wilpena pound especially captivating, and Leggo tells how he captured the Flinders Ranges scene in such a unique way: "Early morning fog rested just above the edge of Wilpena Pound as I waited for the sun to rise. Slowly, as if the Pound itself was waking up, the band of fog and the cliffs lit up in colour. From the dark early morning to the bright colours that ensued, I stood watching, reflecting on how many times this scene had unfolded over the thousands of years that Wilpena Pound has existed."

The pages of the Snow section illustrate the diversity of the Australian environment and the extent the photographer went to for his art. Here, Leggo talks us through Alpine Magic: "Below zero with a minus 14 degrees wind chill, I was huddled on the ground around my tripod to protect my camera from the buffeting winds. The spectacular Mount Feathertop made for a stunning backdrop. This awesome experience was how I started the day. Minutes after this photograph, the first flurries of snow began to fall as a snow storm set in, dumping nearly a metre of snow on the region. I love being out in conditions like this to capture the true magic of the Australian Alps in winter."

Leggo's tips for the best photography is to get up early for capturing the best light or to wait until the sun has set, when the light is soft and outdoor scenes look more impressive.

"In many of these less travelled locations it's these times of day when the wildlife is more active and if it's a popular tourist area no one is around to get in your shot," he said.

Australia: A Photographic Journey *is available through the Scott Leggo Gallery in Kingston ACT or online at scottleggo.com.*



Optitec
Wireless Remote Control Movers

MAGIC IN A BOX

Looking for a great way to keep the festive season alive? Laithwaites' Magic in a Box have recently undergone a stylish, bold new look to match the guaranteed authenticity of every bottle they sell. If you've been interested in searching for a new favourite wine, the Magic in the Box is the way to go as Laithwaites go direct to smaller, family-run wineries where winemaking is a way of life and a source of pride which shows in the quality of their wine. By building long-standing relationships with vineyards across Australia, Laithwaites has been able to keep costs down, an added bonus to the home delivery they provide. This is your chance to experience some of Australia's best wines, from party favourites, to roses, to pinot gris, to vegan wines.

MORE INFO

RRP: Mixed Cases from $113

W: laithwaites.com.au

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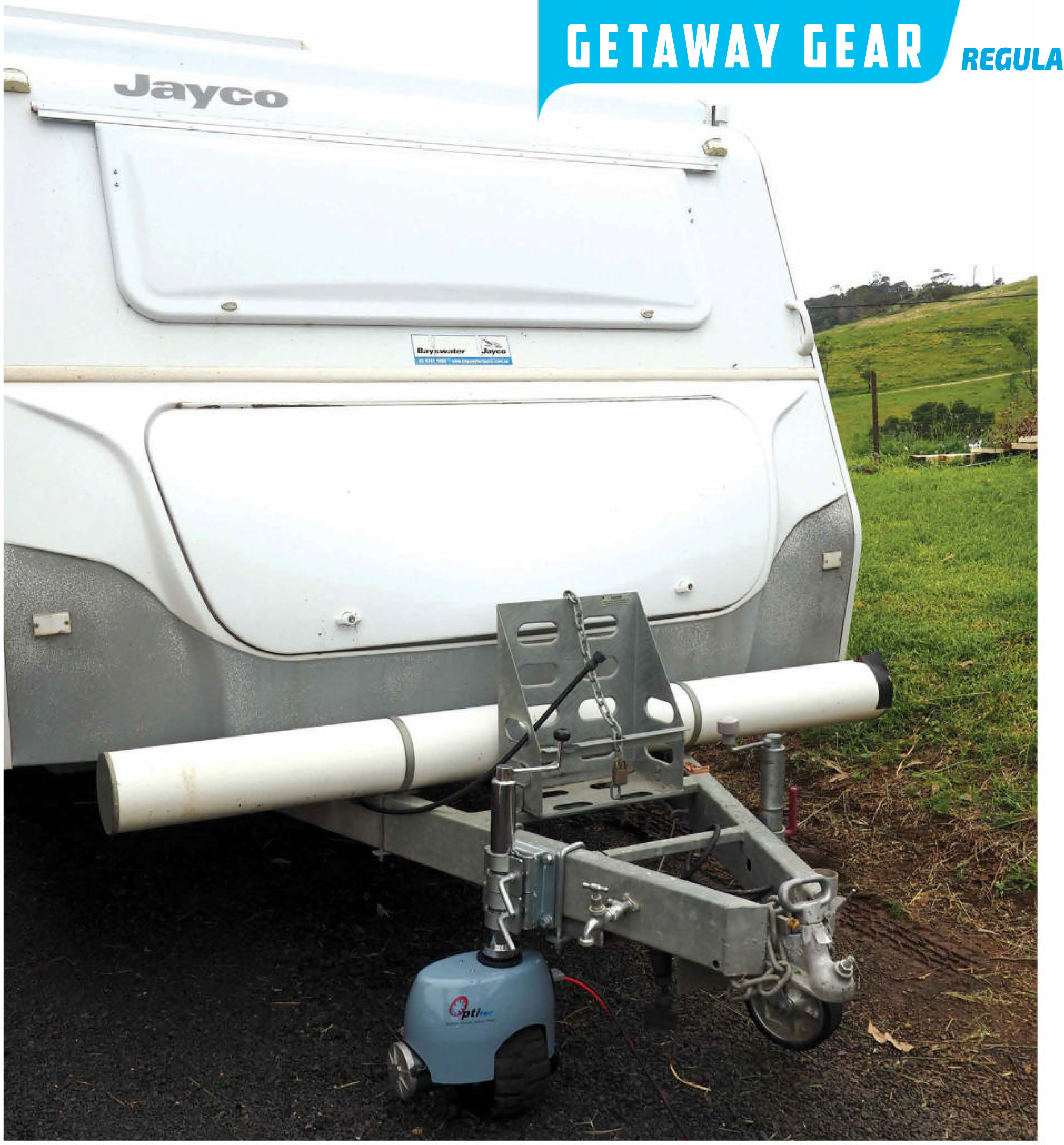


OPTITEC CARAVAN MOVER

For many, especially those new to caravanning, storing and moving a van into a tight space can be daunting. Backing up a long driveway or around a corner into a shed is a tough ask, and no one wants to risk damage to the van, the house or the garage. Luckily, Optitec has come to the rescue with its compact 12V powered mover.

The first Optitec hit the market in 2011. Now in its third iteration as the aptly named V3, and sales worldwide have exceeded 4000 units.

Weighing 22kg, the mover is light enough to transport in the van when travelling, although I would imagine most owners would have a specific need at home to store their van. But, if performing a reversing circus in front of a tough audience in a caravan park isn't your idea of a fun holiday, the mover might be a permanent item in your van. The mover attaches to a twin arm jockey wheel clamp that can be left on the A-frame if your van only has a single arm clamp.

The Optitec team in Melbourne sent us their press demo to see how it performed. Attaching the optional clamp to a Jayco Journey Outback was straightforward. We used the van's regular jockey wheel to raise the A-frame and then lined up the slots in the arm of the wheel to lock it in place and made sure it was in its lowest position ready to do its thing. I then connected the 4m extension lead to the mover's Anderson plug and the other alligator clips to a 12V battery quad bike.

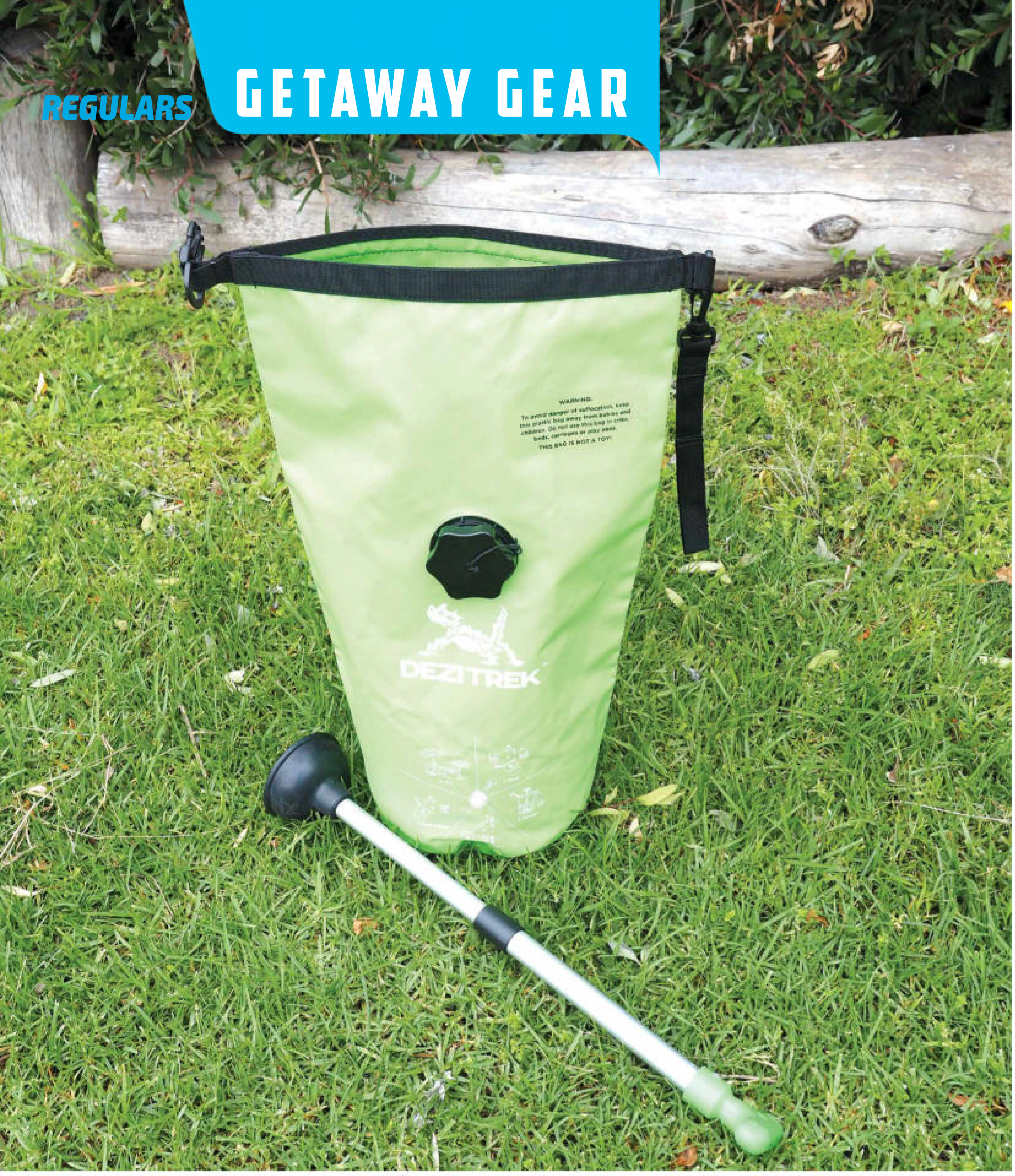
With the coast clear, the remote powered the mover into action. The Jayco's battery was inside under the bed, but almost all vans will have an onboard battery for easy connection, and a permanent self-contained solution would be easy.

The mover worked well on firm 15mm gravel-covered ground, efficiently dragging the 2000kg van for several metres at a safe but reasonably swift speed. The remote quickly turned the wheel 90 degrees and the tandem axle Jayco moved at the angle desired. To simulate a trick manoeuvre around a shed, we turned the van through a 90-degree turn and parked it back exactly where it was.

The Optitec V3 is rated for vans or trailers up to 3500kg and a 350kg tow ball weight. While we didn't get to try the mover on grass, I'm told it works best with the mover's wheel on some small movable sheets of ply.

The mover is available through optitec.com.au and is $2,495, including shipping. While this cost initially seemed high, there's value in the ease of use and the prospective saving on damage inflicted on the van when moving around with your vehicle. In addition, Optitec supply a range of Double clamp brackets starting at $100 for various A-frame sizes, and the mover has a three-year Australia-wide warranty.

MORE INFO
RRP: $24595
W: optitec.com.au



GET THE WASHING DONE

Even with many vans now equipped with a washing machine, we can't always hook up the 240V power. Given a choice between clean clothes and a stinky aroma, the Dezitrek Plunger Wash Bag might be a simple alternative to banging your garments on a rock.

The Dezitrek was developed in Australia by travelling mum Carrie Kelton, a self-described freecampaholic. Carrie told us the bag saves time and money at laundromats and is eco-friendly by using less water, especially if you switch to biodegradable soapberries for a rinse-free wash.

Made from high-quality waterproof PVC, the washers come in two sizes and can be rolled to take minimal space for storage.

We tried the medium version, which is big enough for a pair of jeans, a couple of t-shirts and some undies, and I'm told it's twice the size of the small model. The system comes with an extendable aluminium shaft plunger with a rubber head to give the clothes and ourselves a vigorous workout.

After filling the bag with water to the fill line, we added a small scoop of dry detergent. Don't use too much as the water volume is low. Around ten up and down mixes were enough to stir up the soapy water, ready for draining. In the past, we have used a bucket with a lid to slop around when we drive, but the plunger gives a much better agitation of the clothes to get the soapy water right in.

By rolling the top of the bag down a few tight turns and clipping the bag shot, it was ready for the draining cycle. A 4in drain hole is exposed after unscrewing the cap, and by kneeling on the bag, most of the water was squeezed out of the clothes.

We then a freshwater cycle like the first cycle, and once rinsed, the clothes were ready to hang for drying. You can use wool wash and save on water by doing away with the freshwater wash

The bag and plunger seem strongly built, and together they make a practical and fashionable looking product finished in bright green. You can use the bag for dirty clothes, and there's a strap for hanging to dry. The plunger folds down for storage, and both fit in their own drawstring bag.

MORE INFO

RRP: $69.98 (small), or $74.98 (medium)
W: dezitrekgear.com

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ON SALE
17 FEBRUARY

.Next issue

Next month we look at van maintenance and upgrades. John Hughes gives us a how-to of van maintenance at home, and John Ford looks at converting to lithium. Alongside a variety of vans, we then hit the road, exploring as far south as Tassie, all the way up to Broome, WA — plus more!

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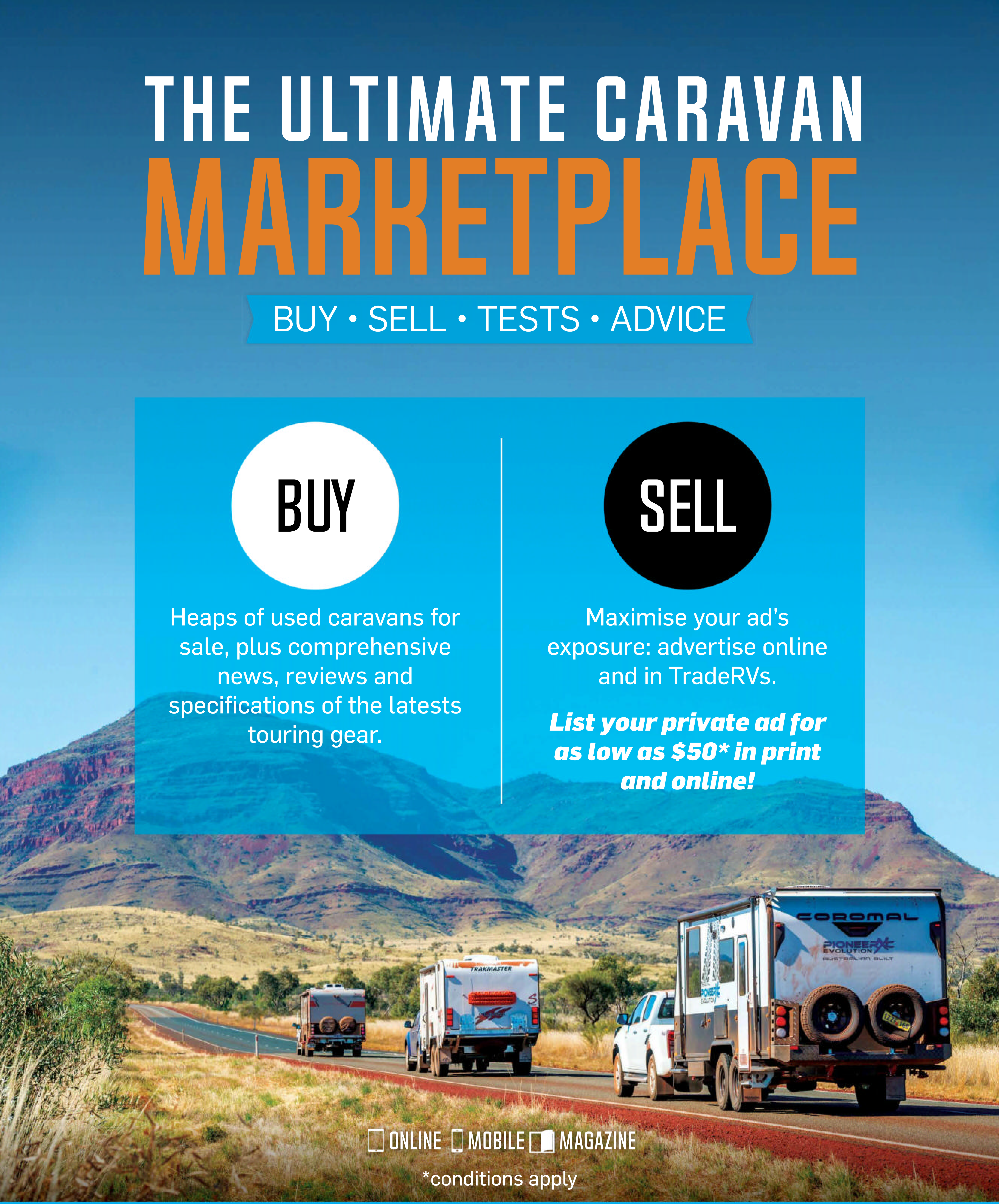
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